

TRANSCENDENCE

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HOW TO UNLOCK YOUR INNER PURPOSE AND
MANIFEST YOUR DREAMS



WAYLON CORNELIUS



FOREWORD

This book is a testament to the power of embracing our imperfections, of acknowledging that it is our struggles that define us, that shape our journey, and that ultimately lead us to hope. Waylon's words reflect his depth, humility, and collective ambition to ensure that we help others through our shared experience of life's imperfections.

Waylon's stories remind you that you are not alone in your pursuit of a better, more meaningful life. And through these stories, Waylon shows how an elegantly simple shift in perspective allows us to help ourselves, which enables us to help others.

May this book be a source of inspiration and a reminder that it is through our messiness that we find our truest selves and connect with others. Welcome to a journey of self-discovery, growth, and the enduring belief that hope is always within reach.

David Ameer Wallace

Associate Patent Counsel, Johnson & Johnson

The events and conversations in this book have been set down to the best of the author's ability, although some names and details have been amended to protect the privacy of individuals.

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*This is for young men and women everywhere
Trying to navigate their path forward,
To the child dreaming of their future
With no idea of the possibilities that life has to offer,
To those stuck in a low socioeconomic status,
Convinced that their condition is the blueprint for their future.*

&

*To my daughter, Amara Amai Cornelius.
May these words forever live on through you,
May you be empowered through your father's story.
May this glimpse into my life provide you with fuel to make it
Through your days as you develop and grow.*

*Your mother and I decided that we would live our lives limitlessly,
Chasing the things that God has designed for us and given us access to.
In this same fashion, we know you will continue the legacy;
Continue to embark upon new endeavors as you shine your light on the world.
With your mind, you have the power to change economies at large,
Helping to restore peace and love to the world.
I love you forever and always,
Your father,*

Waylon Cornelius

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2

I whisper these words as I gaze at the mountains and hilltops while traveling through the scenic Northern California Great Valley ranges. As I reminisce about my life and the trajectory of shifting truths I have discovered along my journey, the train roars, knocking me out of my nostalgic moment. Back in full consciousness I begin to write these words to inspire the multitudes and bring forth new thoughts for reflection.

PREFACE

The ambulance screeched as it drove out onto the field, its sirens blaring.

My skin beaded with sweat and anxiety; shivers went down my spine, impulsing my body into chills. I watched as the young man was lifted onto the stretcher and loaded into the back of the ambulance.

It's all part of the game, I told myself.

My best friend, Anthony, dapped me up and said, “O man, you got you a body now.”

After crashing down into a defensive tackle on a down block for a run play, I had unleashed all my harnessed power, giving the other player two broken ribs.

In that moment, I realized I was a force to be reckoned with.

I was enamored with the feeling of power and strength, but simultaneously felt a sense of compassion flowing through my body—like blood through a vein—for the young man I'd hit.

“You're a beast—you're going to make it!”

Everyone who watched me play football during my last two years in high school told me I had what it took to make it. Like a broken record, I heard them congratulate me over and over again, telling me I was on my way.

They were wrong...

INTRODUCTION

In 1920, Fritz Pollard became the first African American to play in the National Football League, opening a new door of opportunity for young men of color to excel and create legacies for themselves and their families. Since then, many young African Americans have based their dreams and aspirations on becoming the next big player. Yet all too many don't. I was one.

I didn't make it to the goal line the way I had been expected to, nor did I make it to where I wanted to be. I faced a hurdle on the field of life. This forced me out of bounds into a long detour, but eventually led to my breakthrough. On this detour I discovered a higher purpose, and with it my true identity.

Too many of those who don't manifest their sports dreams have their hopes shattered and are unable to rebuild. They are left with lasting injuries or broken dreams, they lose their spirit and can't move forward into something more meaningful. This is an unrecognized, unspoken trauma that impacts thousands across the nation, more extensively than many realize.

This book isn't intended to cast a negative light on the sport of football or any other professional sport. If you are an athlete, I want to reassure you that there's a greater purpose for your life after your

sports career, however “high” or “low” the level you played at was perceived to be. But this book applies to anyone who feels stuck or limited in some way. My intention is to inspire *transcendence* for the mind and soul, whatever your background. If you’re looking for inspiration on how to get unstuck, how to move on with your life, then this book is for you. It is written for everyone.

So, what will I be talking about?

I will be reflecting on some of my key life events; ones that have shaped my current view of life. I was able to discover, understand, and overcome one of life’s most difficult challenges: the feeling of being stuck in limiting beliefs. When you get stuck like this, you don’t seem to have the power to escape. I got stuck in a mindset that stopped me from dreaming, acting, and changing. In these pages, I unveil the processes I used to break through my mental roadblocks and accomplish many of my life’s goals.

My purpose in doing this is to show you how you, too, can break free.

Like the Earth, we all go through seasons—summer becomes fall, winter changes into spring. Going through these seasons is necessary, as we learn, build strength, and move toward the outcomes we were meant to manifest. I believe we all have an essential role to play, in our families, jobs, and communities—simply put, this is our purpose. Yet, it’s easy to believe otherwise, especially if we aren’t exposing our minds to new ideas, perspectives, and environments. If we never challenge the world that has conditioned us, we don’t give ourselves the chance to change.

The US Census Bureau reported in 2016 that many Americans move multiple times throughout their lifetime. Yet, about 72 percent relocate in close proximity to where they grew up. They don’t go far. This surprising statistic explains, perhaps, why there is such an overwhelmingly complacent attitude from many people in the world; from those who limit their exposure to other cultures, geographic locations, and viewpoints. 6 years after my football career disruption, when I was 25, I decided to relocate from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Sunnyvale, California. This was the season when everything changed

for me. Up until then, I struggled under the weight of the same limiting beliefs, the same naive complacency, as the 72 percent.

I would like to explore the forces that put most people in this state of mind. I will explain how you can break through that invisible barrier and live in alignment with your true purpose. In the following chapters, I discuss the “social paradigm construct” that influences most people to pattern or structure their life in the ways they do. I believe this is not only true here in America, but also abroad, leaking into all civilizations.

I love to travel, meet new people from different cultures, and talk with them to learn about their lives in other countries. From my conversations over the years, and from thinking about my own life, God has shown me the construct. Once I saw it, as plain as the football memorabilia on my wall, I began to embody and share the message: we can all live in an enlightened way, manifesting our wildest dreams. We are all victims of the ideologies that dictate to us the course we must take in life, and we are often limited in our imagination due to our circumstances and environments.

My breakthrough came when I was 27, and it shook me to the core. It was in 2017, in Sunnyvale, California, that I was reborn. At that moment, I came to know that anything is possible if you put your mind to it. This means that you can achieve your own experience of rebirth.

The following pages are filled with advice, exercises, and practical guides to help you make breakthroughs in your life. They will guide you toward your own experience of Transcendence. In Chapter 7 you will find a four-step model that shows you how to put it all together. It’s an easy guide that anyone can implement, designed to help you discover yourself—who you are at your core. At the end of this book, you will also find a link to a workbook that will help you rediscover your passions and dreams, allowing you to generate an actionable plan that will lead you to your destiny.

This book presents a new road map, suitable for anyone who wishes to develop themselves, their communities, and the societies they are a part of. It doesn’t merely contain stories from my life, but

gives a glimpse into my life's paramount foundational encounters. Reading about them will help you learn how you can improve your life and better equip the next generation with tools to help them grow, develop, and master their destinies.

Getting to know yourself—the mind and heart beneath the person—is the first step in your journey toward self-actualization.

THE “I” CRISIS



I began my life's journey deep in the rural heart of South Carolina in the early 1990s, when the world was transitioning from an industrial society to one driven by technology. Like many other African Americans residing in the Bible Belt of America, most of my adolescence was spent in the church, learning of God's grace and mercy, the pillars of my faith today.

On reflection, I appreciate my parents for molding my life by giving it the foundation of God. As children, we are incredibly malleable. We are easily influenced by life experiences and teachings, and we are shaped by the beliefs our parents have adopted.

Like many other boys, I began very early in sports, and after winning a minor league tee ball championship, I decided to move on to the more tactical sport of football. My brother was obsessed with it and encouraged me to try out. He and I were the ultimate competitors; whatever he did, I had to do better. He was the older brother, with gleaming influence and success in every other area. So, when it came to football, in my head I had to create my own personal success to finally step out from my brother's shadow.

Truthfully, the first year I played football, I sucked immensely, and

my little league team, Coburg Dairy, went on to a 2-8 losing season. This was the first time I can remember failing at something, despite putting my best foot forward. Though we had a horrific season, we all still ended up with trophies and a season-ending pizza party. Now, many might say “the problem with our society is that we reward kids for failing.” However, this experience taught me a critical life lesson: even though I failed throughout the season, I shouldn’t give up and should keep pursuing success. The failure ultimately encouraged me to go home and work on myself during the summer, to relentlessly develop the skills and strategies I needed to succeed at football.

At that point, I was transitioning from sixth grade to seventh, which allowed me the opportunity to officially compete in middle school athletics. This was an actual test of growth and development during puberty. During this stage, there’s an increased level of testosterone and energy ready to be exerted at a moment’s notice. That summer before my seventh-grade year, I transformed my body by taking control of my diet. I went on a low fat, low sugar diet and I lost all the baby fat I was lugging around. I also experienced a growth spurt, putting me in the highest percentile for height in my age group. I began working with my brother on drills and my form, to prepare for my middle school football debut. I vividly remember the first day of practice. I was given some old sweat-stained equipment. I valued these tremendously, because I knew they would be used to create my legacy.

I lined up against one of the biggest linemen on the team, sweating profusely from the Southern summer heat. We engaged in a drill known as “butterflies.” As I squatted in the three-point stance that I had perfected over the summer, I dug four fingers into the sand-smitten grass and looked my opponent in the eye. *You don’t even know what I’m about to unleash upon you*, I thought.

The whistle blew—“Phwwwwhht!”—the sound of our collision was like two trains slamming into one another. I overpowered the young man and drove him backwards, winning the battle and setting the tone for who I would become as a football player. My summer training had paid off.

"Cornelius, great work; we see a lot of potential and promise in you if you work hard and learn our system," the defensive coach said while walking me to the locker room after practice. Excited about the season, I worked diligently in and out of practice, to ensure I would perform my best on the field. I started playing defensive tackle that year and our team went on to a very successful season, only losing one game.

After that season my family and I relocated to my mother's hometown of Bethune, South Carolina. I was immediately introduced to the high school varsity football coach, who invited me to become a part of his weightlifting training program. Coach Ron Blackmon took me under his wing and began to instill sports discipline, technique, and critique into my life. I was honored because he had previously coached many stellar athletes who went on to play both at the collegiate and professional level. Under his coaching I went on to place first in my weight division in South Carolina State weightlifting competitions for two consecutive years. All of this training and success flowed onto the football field, enabling me to become a dynamic player. With hard work and dedication over the next five years, I became an All-State, All-Region, All-Area, and North/South All-Star Bowl defensive end. Football was my utmost desire, passion, and identity, and it ultimately landed me a scholarship opportunity to attend Newberry College in 2008.

My introduction to college as a student athlete came with an intense workload. I began to juggle exhausting 18-hour days. 3 a.m. football practice; 8-hour classroom lectures; 2-hour weight training sessions; 3-hour study sessions. I was committed so I adapted quickly. A year into college, while I was still on a high from playing the sport I loved at the collegiate level, my dream abruptly began disappearing.

I had been blessed with the opportunity to graduate high school and go on to college on a football and music scholarship. The chance to go to Newberry College was a big deal. Newberry College is in the Division II of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), known for its history of producing NFL talent, such as Ron Parker, Brandon Bostick, and Corey Washington. The institution boasts a rich

Lutheran tradition and affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and is also known for the cultivation of some of South Carolina's most renowned politicians. If you got in, you were rubbing shoulders with the state's elite and were in with a chance of joining their networks for life. I was the first in my family to make it to college and play sports at the collegiate level. However, both the football and music scholarships combined barely put a dent in Newberry's \$30,000 annual tuition fees. But I went anyway, believing that, somehow, things would work out. I attended the first semester and became an honor roll student. Despite my success, I returned to school after the winter break to be notified of an outstanding balance of \$18,000, due before the next school term. This put me into a state of financial panic. I immediately called my parents and told them the news. The silence on the other end of the phone was deafening. I could have sworn I heard my mother's brain thinking, trying to figure out how she would be able to help me. After a few moments of sighs and murmuring, I realized that, though my parents desperately wanted to help me, they just didn't have the means.

As a young man, I witnessed my father tirelessly work a full-time job, sometimes 10 to 12 hours a day, even continuing to work on the weekends. He worked a variety of freelance jobs: car repair maintenance worker, carpenter, concrete contractor, lawn care servicer, home maintenance, and several others, all to make ends meet and take care of our family. My mother was the ultimate nurturer and caregiver; she worked for the school district as a bus driver to help support our home. At 18 years old, I was not financially literate, but I understood the basics of needing enough money to participate in certain things in life. I knew my parents were doing all they could to keep a roof over our heads, and didn't have any left over to contribute to my education. This was an incredibly humbling moment in my life.

No matter how bad my mother and father wanted to provide for me, the harsh reality was that they simply didn't have it to give. I left this conversation with an understanding that I would finish the term and then return home. I hoped I would never be in the same position

as my parents when I was older. I felt let down, but I knew my parents felt helpless too. From that moment I vowed that I would develop myself so that I would never be in this type of situation again and that I could help other family members and friends.

But perhaps there was still hope. I met with my head coach to see if he could do anything to help increase my scholarship amount. He said there was nothing he could do for me, but he recommended I set up a meeting with Newberry College's president, who happened to live in a historic estate residence at the very top of the hill on campus. I had never been there before, but had heard rumors of how elegant and prestigious the place was. In fact, you needed an invitation to visit if you were going there for anything but to be disciplined. My football coach coordinated the meeting, and I attended dressed in a crisp, white button-up shirt and a pair of firmly-pressed slacks. I wanted to show that I meant business and my request was sincere. I remember walking up the steep hill, about a mile from my dorm room. All I could do was pray that the president and his staff would show mercy. After all, I was an honorable student, athlete, and member of the music department. I reached the door with sweat beading on my forehead and prayed, *Please God let this go in my favor.*

I knocked on the creaky door and the receptionist greeted me.

"Come on in, the president will be right out to meet you."

My body filled with anxiety and fear. I hoped that I would be able to clearly communicate my requests. The president quickly came out to greet me. He welcomed me into his home and directed me to his office. He invited me to take a seat in the huge leather chair opposite his.

"So, what can I do for you, Mr. Cornelius?"

I looked directly into his eyes and explained my situation, desperately hoping he'd see the sincerity in my face. He nodded, and seemed empathetic throughout our conversation. I outlined all the wonderful things I had accomplished in my short time at Newberry, and all the things I wished to pursue if afforded financial assistance to continue.

After about ten minutes, he told me that he shared my concern,

and sympathized with my situation, and highlighted the services that were in place to help students in similar situations. He pointed me in the direction of various campus loan programs, and then plainly stated,

“Other than that, Mr. Cornelius, I’m sorry. There’s nothing else I can do for you at this time.”

I was frozen in place and took a moment to gather my thoughts. I thanked him for his time and began my journey back to my dorm room. After doing some back-of-the-napkin math I realized that, if I took advantage of the loan programs, I would be able to graduate within four years, but with around \$80,000 in student loan debt. This was overwhelming. It would create an immense burden to be under so much debt, just as I was beginning my career. I would be working backwards, I thought. I was hurt because I knew that I was excelling academically, musically—and athletically, which was the ultimate gut punch. I was about to have this opportunity taken away from me due to circumstances that were outside my control. I felt vulnerable and powerless. As the semester drew to a close, I knew this was the final chapter of my football career. This crushed me. My sense of worth and value were decimated. I had literally poured my blood, sweat, tears, and even broken bones into the sport of football. Only, in return, to be left feeling shattered. My identity was gone.

It was financial hardship that caused my football career to come to a screeching halt, after a single season with Newberry College. It was not any lack of talent, ability, or desire.

This experience with football and college—its challenges and painful disappointment—unleashed the proverbial “dog” inside of me.

In the great words of Dr. Eric Thomas, the Hip Hop Preacher, “Everything in life is going to be a dog fight, and you have to have that dog in you to go after whatever you desire.” Ultimately, my response was to continue pressing forward in life—hungry, looking to the future, even when there was no clear idea of where life would take me. As I reflect upon it now, I can see this was just a part of God’s intended plan for me. The experience brought an exhausted,

despairing soul to the gates of deep insight and true perspective. This, in turn, enabled me to become a beacon of light and hope for others who, like me, have experienced heartbreak from an athletic career cut short, or similar heartbreak from having their dreams taken away from them.

THE HUNT FOR ME (MLP)



Our job in this life is to find out who we already are and become that version of our ourselves.

Seeing the dream of football vanish before my eyes caused me to live dreamless—even by the standards of dreaming I was used to.

I must acknowledge that, as a child, my dreams revolved around things I knew I was good at, or things I was likely to succeed in, with my gifts and abilities. This kind of dreaming doesn't exactly reflect what a dream is at its core, I know. But even this kind of dream, when it was taken from me, crippled my ability to think big. As a result, at 19 years old I accepted a small, safe life. I traded my dreams—big and small—for safety, security, and comfort.

Before leaving college, I visited my brother in Charlotte, North Carolina, for a weekend. I saw his new apartment, he drove me around, introduced me to the fast-paced, growing economy of the Queen City, and shared with me his goals and outlook on life. He asked me about school. I shared with him my experiences over the

past year. He looked me in my eyes and asked, his voice filled with concern, “So, what’s your next move? What’s your plan now?” I shamefully replied that I would be returning home and trying to figure things out from there. “No, you’re going to move to Charlotte with me and I will get you a job, and you can figure out what you want to do from there.” Overwhelmed with surprise and joy, I felt hope flowing through my veins. He didn’t know it, but he single-handedly shifted the trajectory of my life in that moment. For this alone, I will always hold my brother in the highest regard, no matter what life throws our way.

With hope restored, I began to fantasize about living in the city. I thought of the new experiences I would have, and all the new opportunities. When it finally came, the transition to the Charlotte metropolitan area opened me up to the possibility of great things—things I knew would eventually manifest. However, at first I hadn’t the slightest clue about what my next steps would be. I simply held onto hope and faith in GOD.

But first, I returned to my parents in Bethune, with a bitter taste in my mouth. The next day, as promised, my brother came, picked me up and I made my way to Charlotte with no intention of ever looking back. We high-tailed it out of the country in his 99 Ford Mustang GT, on our way to a new life in the city.

As soon as we arrived, my brother took me to his workplace: Discount Tire Company. I was surprised by an on-the-spot, in-person interview with the store manager, who asked me if I was half as talented as my brother. This simple question ignited a fire of competitiveness inside me. After about five minutes, he looked me in the eyes and stated, “Alright, I’m going to give you a shot. You start Monday, and we will see what you got.” Excited and thrilled that I landed a job so quickly and effortlessly, I immediately began to plan out how I would start to adjust to this new life of work and adulthood. I began to gather feedback from family members and friends on this next stage of my life. Overall, the consensus was in alignment with the social construct I like to call the *model life paradigm* (MLP for short).

What is the MLP? It’s the “model” by which we are told to live our

lives. The model, for most people, is that, as a child, your “job” is to go to school to learn all the knowledge, skills, and tools you need to effectively engage in the world as an adult. After high school, most are faced with about four options:

1. continue education through college
2. enlist in the military
3. become an entrepreneur of sorts
4. get a conventional job

Most people are encouraged to complete their education and use their knowledge to acquire a good job that will serve them well. Society lays out the rules. Once you have the career of your dreams, then you need to find a spouse, get married, and purchase a home for your family. Then, once you have a spouse and a home, you can begin to procreate and bring children into this world, to further your lineage and continue populating the world. This structure, this *model*, became my new life target. Without deeply consulting with myself, I began working towards this, daily—mindlessly, like a programmed robot.

So, now, at the tender age of 18, I began to stake out my role in the working world, seeking to check off all the boxes of the *model life paradigm* and discover my new identity in the process. Although college didn’t work out for me, I was determined to move forward. I became self-sustaining for the first time in my life. I worked tirelessly, over 40 hours a week, quickly adapting to Discount Tire’s workflow system. My unmatched performance and dependability quickly transferred from the football field to the tire shop, in the hope that I would find a source of new purpose and vision.

The store manager, Paul Lee, made an immeasurable impression on my life, because of his enthusiastic candor and deal-making abilities. He demonstrated how to effectively approach business and customer service. After about a month of working there, our team met a big monthly goal, and he bought the team lunch to celebrate our success. During the luncheon, he pulled me aside and said he had been watching me, and he was impressed by how quickly I had

learned the company's systems. He saw a great future ahead for me. After that conversation, I was dedicated and worked for Discount Tire for almost four years. During that time, I gained a lot of valuable knowledge. I acquired top industry mechanical skills, business management skills, and mastered sales techniques and customer relations skills. I now recognize the vital skills gained from this opportunity. The good and bad that came with this were part of my process, shaping and molding me. Although I truly enjoyed my co-workers and the community Discount Tire provided, I began to realize the *dream* that they were trying to sell me was not in alignment with what I desired for my life. During this time I began to lean into the visions that other people had for my life, because I didn't have a true vision of my own—which is truly dangerous. When you're not actively deployed towards your own vision, people may use you to their benefit and employ you for their vision. I began to realize that, for the amount of time I worked versus the amount of pay received, I had to do something different to be able to live the type of life I had imagined. The late hours and Saturday work-days were a major hindrance to my development as a musician, which I valued highly. After developing my guitar skills for some years, my music career began to catch fire, landing me several opportunities to play and record with some big name R&B and gospel recording artists. So, after weighing the odds and reflecting seriously on what I wanted out of life, I decided to leave Discount Tire to pursue bigger opportunities that could provide an enhanced lifestyle; one that would support all my needs, desires, and visions.

At this point in my life I began to miss the sport of football dearly, with its tactile nature. I'd trained hard, always been physically active, and was in my prime. So, an occupation in law enforcement felt like a natural progression. I felt it would provide me with the type of adventurous work I was in pursuit of. It would be active, demanding, and fulfilling. After applying for three different agencies and passing both the written and physical examinations, I was turned down. Simply because other applicants scored higher than me. I was disappointed, of course, but in hindsight it was a true blessing from God. My brother

went forward into a career in law enforcement, and based on his stories and the work schedule he endured, I understood that God knew this occupation was not for me, nor did it ultimately align with the vision I had for my professional life.

During the application process, I gave myself an ultimatum. If I didn't get into law enforcement by the time I turned 23, I would try out option 2 in the *model life paradigm* and enlist in the military. So, after getting rejected from every police organization I applied to—and against all of my heart and mind's will—I enlisted into the United States Air National Guard.

In high school my best friend and I made a pact to never join the military. My brother and other family members also advised me against joining. So, I was reluctant to join, and the decision made me feel as if I was not honoring my word. But, as I thought about it now, it was a great opportunity, and so I decided to leave the pact in the past and trust my own judgment.

The United States Air National Guard is the National Guard component of the United States Air Force. Enlisting served as a great opportunity for me to gain additional employment with some incredible benefits. My plan was to join the military part-time, work a civilian job full-time, and go to school part-time to complete my bachelor's degree in network systems administration. Doing this would allow me to fulfill both option 1 and 2 in the paradigm.

On August 27, 2013 I was shipped off to San Antonio, Texas, where I went through basic training for two months. Subsequently, I was forward processed to Wichita Falls, Texas, for four months, and later Little Rock, Arkansas for two months, where I completed my technical training as an aircraft mechanic working on the C-130 airframe. I was disciplined, and completed all my training at the forefront of my squadron, setting the example for many of my fellow airmen.

Determined and driven, I returned home to Charlotte and secured a new opportunity to work for the multinational conglomerate Honeywell International Inc., in their productivity solutions sector. I took on the position of electronics tester technician in their barcode-scanner

electronics division. This new role opened my mind to the power of technology. During this time, I made one of my biggest life decisions: I got married to my girlfriend, who I had dated for nearly five years.

According to the *model life paradigm*, the pieces were coming together—maybe not in the right order, but they were coming together nonetheless. I finally had a “good job,” benefits, wife, home, cars, access to education, and various other opportunities. From the outside looking in, one could say I was living the dream. But the truth was—I must put it plainly—I was living the world’s *image* of a dream life. I was not living *my* dream life.

At the age of 24, I had accomplished a lot. I was mature in some ways. I was responsible, honest, a dependable working man; but my decisions were not conscious. I was living with a state of mind that was not my own. It was as if I were a computer, programmed to act according to beliefs that were downloaded into my psyche from my adolescence—perhaps even earlier. In the moment, when I looked around and if I didn’t think too hard, everything appeared idyllic. I had a home, a wife, all the comforts that are supposed to fulfill you. Yet inside I was battling with myself. When I looked a little deeper, I could see I wasn’t happy.

Out of frustration and angst I began to seek out other women as an escape from my own shortcomings. After a fierce internal battle over what I wanted out of life—where I wanted my future to go—I still didn’t have a clear picture; but I did know I wasn’t there. I also knew that I didn’t want to make anyone else suffer as a result of my inner conflicts. So, after battling internally for over a year I decided to separate from my spouse and began to explore some of the things in life I needed to do for myself. Feeling like a true failure and the lowest person on Earth, I continued on with an ounce of hope that, just maybe, I would get another chance at marriage one day. Looking back, I realize that leaving was a selfish act; however, it ultimately proved to be one of the best decisions of my life. Selfish, yes, but honest and motivated by the need to survive, and to thrive on my own terms. That was when I began to explore “Waylon” in my own time and at my own pace. I no longer had to live under the shadow of external

influences. I believe this was the most critical part of my self-development journey.

During this phase, I explored many things that I had hoped to explore while in my relationship, but didn't get the chance. I began to travel, read, and spend time with people from all walks of life. This time allowed me to develop my mind; I was lucky enough to find distinguished and accomplished intellectuals to talk with, which, in turn, motivated me to achieve more in my life. I believe that this time was so precious for me. I looked back over my life so far. After my year at Newberry College, I had first moved to Charlotte and immediately started dating my ex-wife at the age of 18. I was then technically still under my parents' rule. So, whether it was parents, college, or in relationships, I had never truly existed on my own. At 26, for the first time, I was free. I looked to no one for any of my decisions.

This was monumental. The reason I highlight its importance is because a season of singleness can help you understand who you are. This will allow you to figure out what you do and do not like as an adult. It makes room for you to discover yourself, your purpose, vision, dreams, goals, and ambitions. When you know yourself, and when you are comfortable with yourself, you will be able to see clearly and make decisions based on your own mind, heart, and soul. Then, later, once you're connected with a partner, you can truly recognize whether they are someone who will bring value into your life, based on your deep understanding of yourself.

Up until this point, and like so many others, I had focused on checking off all of the boxes in the *model life paradigm*. For me it was:

- school ☒
- military ☒
- good job ☒
- wife ☒
- house ☒

I had all of these by the age of 24, but it left me feeling frustrated; like, *is this it for me and my life?* I had thought that, after I completed

these steps and earned these things, I would feel fulfilled, having accomplished what I had been told to accomplish. Instead, I was left feeling unsatisfied. As if I knew this was what the world *said* I needed, yet it was not *what I needed*.

The *model life paradigm* is one of the most dangerous systems; it is responsible for creating a huge, painful gap between our intended purpose and the “life success outcomes” that don’t fulfill us when we achieve them. There is not much else that is so heavily responsible for such a disparity. Many people are striving daily to check the boxes the world has laid before them, but doing this, in reality, rarely brings true purpose and happiness.

There has to be another way to discover yourself. I believe there is. The following chapters show how I found my path—and how you can find yours.

EXPOSURE



Everyone's perspective of themselves and others is based on the limitations of their exposure.

—Kamala Harris

Is your reality prohibiting you from obtaining the growth you desire?

Are you willing to challenge your reality to find inspiration and new perspectives that will catapult you to your next dimension?

If so, you have to understand that, oftentimes, what you see is not what others see. We naturally live in parallel worlds of perception, bounded by our own interests and experiences. What may be obvious to you may be invisible to other people, and vice versa.

We all exist in different realities, often even in the same households.

“Perception” involves micro-signals traveling through your nervous system, which begin as a response to external stimuli and end with your mind and body experiencing a sensation or generating an image of the world outside. But it is more than that. It is not just light striking the retina of the eye and an image forming, with the same result for everybody. Perception involves assigning meaning. It is an

act of interpretation, an understanding of any given environment, situation, or person—and these understandings differ from person to person.

Your perspective is your “point of view.” Created by your mind as well as your physical senses, your perception is something you create; it becomes the lens through which you see the world, and it determines how you view yourself, and everything around you. “Reality” may be the objective truth, but your *perception of reality* is just one version of it, among many others. Depending upon how you have developed as a person—which includes the conditions and influences that shaped you in the past, as well as your choices and reactions—your perception and your perspective may lead you to deny or dismiss some parts of reality, or embrace them. You may be a person who can view situations from others’ points of view, and you may be a person who sees opportunities in life’s challenges, failures, and disappointments. If you are, you are lucky enough to be living a more expansive life than many. If you are not, I have good news for you: you can change, because your perception is something learned, it is not who you are forever. You can change it. I did, and I’m not special. So, if I can, you can. We all can.

To unlock my potential, so that I could move up to my next level in life, I had to break out of my perceived reality. The perspective that was mine—that I mistakenly thought was “me”—was just something created by the *model life paradigm*. I must admit I lived with a small town mentality for many years. The phrase “small town mentality” is often considered disrespectful. However, the phrase reigns supremely true when describing an individual stuck in their current life situation, with no aspiration or true direction on how to lift themselves out of it. In my case, I felt stuck at different segments in my life, due to my lack of education and knowledge.

Early on, throughout my teens and young adult years, I would often receive comments on how I spoke. From general conversations to the classroom and work presentations, I would often be told to speak up, or repeat what I was saying. People would say I was slurring my words when I talked. Being from the South I naturally spoke at a

slower pace than others, and on top of that my deep, raspy voice set me up for quite the challenge when communicating. Over time the criticism began to chip away at my perception of myself. This created an invisible internal battle that I began to fight. Unequipped with the correct weaponry to take on this battle, I began to shy away from situations that highlighted my apparent weakness. This caused me to fear growth. I had limitations, I thought. That was what everyone seemed to be telling me. This internal battle haunted me.

I was determined to not let it beat me, but getting out from under it was not easy, and took a long time. The fears and anxiety around communication held me back, and caused me to adopt a small town mentality. It made me afraid of the future, made me think I should take the first job I got and stay in it. I believed that was all I deserved. But I was fortunate, because there was another voice inside me—perhaps it came from my sports training and my time at Newberry. It told me that I had more within me, that I could move up and achieve more, if I was willing to put my fears aside and believe in myself.

Work and self-education experiences helped me begin to combat this apparent shortcoming. As I learned more and more, my vocabulary developed and the way I approached communication changed. I became more conscious of how I was communicating. At first, I would pre-plan conversations, speeches, and presentations, when I was able. This helped me communicate effectively. With time, my confidence grew and I didn't need to plan so much. I was developing the art of conversation and good communication. It wasn't an overnight fix, but with each small success I felt my abilities, and my self-belief, grow.

Seeing my speech and language issue shift showed me that my small town mentality was not something unchanging or unbeatable. That's the thing about change, no matter how small. One small triumph has a tendency to lead to another, and then another, and before you know it, the change isn't so small. The trick is to find ways to create these little victories for yourself, and then to stay aware of them. Once I felt my voice growing stronger, and my language clearer, it was as if a fog began to clear. Then I realized something. The small town mentality: it wasn't really "me" at all. It came from somewhere

else, and I could move beyond it. When I decided to do this, I was able to shift toward a new “me,” which was truly exciting.

I attribute my ability to expand my perception and perspective to exposure to new living conditions, climates, and cultures. Although some exposures may challenge your core, rooted fundamentals, I believe you will glean the most from them if you are able to keep an open mind. Let’s examine how I began to find “exposure” in my life that would forever shift my perspectives and perception of reality—which ultimately produced dynamic growth.



WHERE WAS I? Ah yes, I was 26 now, but still with Honeywell Inc., in Charlotte, North Carolina. I worked hard and, though I didn’t have a degree, I quickly advanced to the highest position I could. That small-town voice was telling me I’d done well, but this was as much as I could expect from the world. *Stay where you are*, it said. I knew I had tapped out—if I stayed there I’d be going nowhere. The other voice said, you can do more, *be more*, than this. Which voice should I listen to? Dare I risk my safe job and take a step into the unknown? It was a debate that went round and round in my head.

I thought about how financially well-off some of my mother’s siblings were. This made me wonder. I inquired specifically about my aunt’s husband: what had he done to achieve his success? He was a successful businessman in the insurance industry, I was told. This made me want to join him; perhaps to discover whether I could be as great a success as him. Perhaps this was attainable, I thought, because the career didn’t require a degree, only state licensure. I felt limited during this time in my life because I hadn’t finished my degree, which was required to take on a lot of the opportunities that were interesting. I felt the commitment to finish the degree was extensive and I needed to make money *now*. So, I deferred the degree option until the “right time.” I learned there’s no such thing in life as the right time.

So, I felt limited by not having a degree. I worried about my language skills. I was still a little bruised by my divorce, and behind all

of that, I hadn't gotten over the loss of my football career. I mourned my lost dream, and all of these created a strong downward pull that made me doubt myself. But, despite all of this, some part of me was a fighter; so, after thinking about it for a few weeks, I threw caution to the wind and just went for it. After two weeks of pre-licensure coursework study and two state exams, I became a registered property and casualty agent in North Carolina. Another two weeks of job searching and I was offered an opportunity to work for a local Allstate agency. I then took the leap of faith: I left my dead-end-yet-secure job with Honeywell to pursue a career in insurance.

It was terrifying and exciting. I felt alive and hungry; I quickly adapted and learned Allstate's business model and systems. I advanced to take on the role of office manager after four months. This allowed me to expand my knowledge in finance; and the integral ways insurance can protect families for generations. This connected me to a new world of both affluent and impoverished individuals—*exposing* me to a diversity of circumstances that I needed to encounter, to learn lessons I may not have learned otherwise.

I enjoyed my time in insurance, but, as the saying goes, "all good things come to an end." In the spring of 2017, I was activated for a six-month deployment to Kuwait. This would bring my days of writing home and auto insurance policies in Charlotte to a close. Wrench turning, plane launching, and bomb shipping are what I remember most about my days in Kuwait's suffocating 115-degree weather. I had the opportunity to work in one of the highest-tempo professional operations that I have ever experienced. I knew my role was critical as an aircraft maintainer because we had to keep the planes in the sky, so they could provide air support for my Army brothers and sisters fighting on the ground. I mean that literally, because my brother Blake was actually deployed with the Army around the same time I was there. At that point in my career, I was only a senior airman E-4, and although I had a lot of professional civilian work experience, my military career was just taking flight. My limiting beliefs would tell me that I was not capable of operating at a high level within such a dynamic organization. The deployment served as my first major

opportunity to display my knowledge and ability to perform. My hard work caught the attention of higher-level supervisors and high-ranking officers. This, in turn, afforded me the opportunity to take on more critical tasks and roles during the deployment, setting the foundation for meaningful, life-long connections with higher-ranking service officials. This experience would chip away at my self-limiting beliefs, inspiring me and showing me that I was capable of much more than the MLP had conditioned me to believe.

Being deployed was a time of reflection and repair for myself, and I began to open my mind to new possibilities after the divorce. I began to look myself in the eye and take responsibility for my marriage downfall. I remember vividly repenting and praying that God would restore my capacity to love again. I felt cold and spiritually void, but as I began to reconnect with God, he purged my heart, restoring my sincere feelings and emotions. This was vital and a key reason why I share with you the importance of understanding who you are connected to within a marriage. This bond will literally give you life, or drain life from you.

I began attending counseling to help myself process things and improve as a person. Simultaneously, I started conducting research, looking into new opportunities that could elevate my life. One day, after my 12-hour shift, I received an email from a civilian-military recruiter who hired veterans for civilian jobs. At first glance, I thought, *Oh, great, another spam message. Delete!* Yet, as I clicked the delete button, the words “Hiring Conference” jumped out at me. So, I scrolled to my trash bin, retrieved the file, and reopened it. The recruitment firm was hosting a 3-day hiring conference in Virginia Beach, on the same weekend I returned from my deployment. Intrigued by the notion of a conference—meaning multiple opportunities in one place—I responded, submitting my registration form. I knew I could always return to my safe, kosher office-manager job with Allstate if I wanted to (the MLP reminded me of this). However, something inside me yearned for more. Even if no opportunities came from the conference, at least I would have experienced a nice post-deployment vacation. It’s very likely that you’ve experienced this same type of struggle inside,

where the MLP is telling you not to expect anything more, but another part of you (your stronger, more imaginative, more energetic part) is dreaming of better. The key to breaking out of one's perceived limits is to find a way of feeding the voice of hope and inspiration.

Fresh off the C-130, I landed in Charlotte on July 4, 2017. On July 6, I cruised up to Virginia Beach and stepped into the Wyndham Hotel Oceanfront conference hall. It was life-changing and provided *maximum exposure*. It was three days full of fundamental job skill information and breathtaking opportunities. I had the opportunity to interview with seven major companies. By the end of the day, that following Sunday, I received three offers from my top three picks. A week later came the one I had been waiting for—and after receiving the official offer from my number one pick, Intuitive Surgical (ISI for short), I seized the opportunity. I would take the job with the surgical robot manufacturer. When I walked into that conference, I couldn't have predicted that I'd learn as much as I did about interviewing with companies, and have direct access to once-in-a-lifetime opportunities with multiple Fortune 500 companies. Exposure, there's nothing like it.

I believe the key is always to keep an open mind, and be open to new opportunities for exposure. Don't just click "delete" on everything. As I hope my story in this chapter has shown, growth is not a "one-and-done" thing. You won't make your biggest dreams come true with just one triumph, one win. But, no matter how small the win you earn for yourself today, it will lead on to others. You hear a lot about the vicious cycle, but there is a *virtuous cycle* to match it. Just as I learned, little by little, you will learn that each positive step makes the next step possible, and the next; and before you know it, you've walked a mile, and then another. If you stay open, if you don't "delete" the scary (but exciting) opportunities, you'll give yourself the opportunity to be mind-blown at how GOD can open doors that you didn't even know existed!

Now, with a fresh breath of hope, I prepared to set my sails northeast of Charlotte to Raleigh, North Carolina. After officially accepting the offer, the weight of the opportunity began to sink in, and I began

to imagine and dream of the possibilities. I knew it was quite the risk, walking away from my job with Allstate and into an industry I'd never worked in and had no practical knowledge of. I had a little money saved from the deployment, but I wondered how I would survive if this job didn't work out. I feared the shame of failure, of having to go back to Allstate to ask for my job back. I felt daunted by such a big transition, having to go across the entire country. While visiting my parents before I left for California, I realized that I had to leave to develop myself, to become the change my family needed for future guidance and preservation. I told myself that, although I didn't know exactly what was going to come from it, I was all in and would give it my all to secure my family's future. I knew if things didn't work out, I could return home to the Carolinas.

Both of my parents were in awe when I told them the news. My mother said, tenderly, "While I don't want you to be so far away, I never want to hold you back from your destiny. You were destined to go far and do great things in life, and I have always known that, since you were born. So, go after your dreams and we'll always be here to support you no matter the outcome." Delighted and encouraged, I packed my bags for my one-way flight to California.

As I stated, the position with ISI was based out of Raleigh; however, the training was in Sunnyvale, California. I was only scheduled to be in California for three months, but delay after delay of the construction of the new facility in Raleigh meant the company retained me in California for over a year-and-a-half. Initially I was very reluctant to get comfortable with the new environment of the Bay Area. I didn't for one second think what the possibilities of living in this environment could mean for my future. The MLP had a hold on me, I didn't believe I was capable or worthy enough to exist in such an environment. I didn't have what it took: that's what the voice said. But the longer I stayed, the more I realized this was a place for me to grow and develop into what I was destined to become. Stunned, my soul leapt for joy because I never imagined I'd be planting roots in California—a place I'd only dreamt of visiting. I began turning somersaults in my mind. This was truly the icing on the cake.

“Welcome to Silicon Valley” is all I remember hearing and seeing as I made my way through the busy San Jose airport. The phrase *Silicon Valley* stuck with me over the coming days, as I began to ask questions and research what it actually meant. After settling into my apartment, I started training at Intuitive Surgical the next day. I felt excitement and fear, because I had never worked in the field of robotics before. I had no idea what to expect; I just knew that whatever I would be doing, I would devote my undivided attention to it. I’d give it my best shot. The MLP was still inside me, and the small town mentality told me that, perhaps, I’d gone too far this time. Perhaps I was out of my depth, and these smart Californian guys would see that I was just a slow-witted Southerner. I had to dig deep to find the other voice, the one that said: *I deserve this, I can do it*. Arriving at the two-story glass-structured headquarters, gleaming and glistening in the California sun, I felt as if I were living out a role from the Showtime series, *Silicon Valley*. This was my first encounter with medical technology and the recurring theme of *innovation*. I took a deep breath, kept listening to the second voice, and pushed through the big front door.

I often reflect on my entrance into this new dynamic landscape, recognizing that it challenged my small town mentality and forced it to shift, in a fundamental way—and I’ve kept that shift. My diverse experiences and open mind have allowed me to reach levels—of intelligence and performance—I wouldn’t have thought possible before the shift took place. Getting there took work. I now live with the attitude that anything is possible and that I can achieve anything I desire. It’s interesting that we have all been equipped with a brain, the most incredible organ in our body. Often the brain is compared to a computer, although I believe it should be the other way around. Engineers and scientists have modeled the computer to process, organize, and execute tasks in the same manner as our minds would, only at a more accelerated pace. Computers have developed so much today from the past, and can now process and store more information than ever before. This is an empowering analogy, highlighting the limitless power of our brains. Let’s tap into that power for advancement.

I began my work at ISI in the Da Vinci remanufacturing division. Daily, I was immersed in the task of deconstructing dated robotic equipment, then using the core elements as the basis for new, sophisticated robotic systems. We would take previous-generation robots and remove all of the electronics (even the robotic manipulators) and upgrade them with the newest high-tech electronics, only reusing the core mechanical shell of the system. At that time, when the redesign was released, it was state-of-the-art, due to ISI having no major competitors in the market. Previously, I had possessed limited knowledge of surgery. My perception was of a human surgeon lacerating a patient, performing a surgical procedure manually. However, this company exposed me to new methods in which surgery is performed through robotic platforms driven by human surgeons. With my mind totally blown and my excitement levels at an all-time high, I would come to work with a newfound thirst for knowledge. I was determined to learn the technology, aiming to become ultra-effective in my role. Through this exposure I began to work hand-in-hand with seasoned engineers and technicians, learning new skills that would sow the seeds that would grow into the new titles and roles I would ultimately fulfill. This equipped me with a new *identity* and *vision* for my life.

I began to live to the fullest for the first time in my life—truly free as the individual I was; and the individual I was working hard to become. I began to connect with a diverse population of people that I hadn't been exposed to in previous work environments—people who exposed me to new life perspectives and perceptions. The exposure to people from all different backgrounds encouraged me to reach for more in life; listening to their stories, a lot of them came from extremely humble beginnings, just like me. From these connections I adopted the mentality that, if they could make it, then no excuses, I could do the same. The inspiration I got from so many talented and courageous people made my small town mentality crack wide open. I'd done a lot of groundwork, and taken all the little steps I've described. All of these wins brought me to the point where I was ready to break free. The incredible examples of the people I met took me the rest of

the way. The small town mentality fell away like an old skin I didn't need anymore. I was free.

Living in California opened my eyes to some societal issues I hadn't considered problematic in the past. For example, I couldn't quite wrap my head around the cost of housing. As a previous homeowner back in the Carolinas, I thought I had a rather informed opinion about housing and the costs associated with it. I became sticker shocked as I rode through a Sunnyvale neighborhood, scrolling through the Zillow housing app. "No way!" is all I could utter to myself. \$1 million, \$1.5 million, \$1.8 million, \$2 million, and \$2.5 million were the prices listed for these small, dated homes. The homes were not what I expected, either, yet the price tags were enormous. This tour through the neighborhood revealed something to me that would stay with me forever. When the mind places limitations in relation to the perception of a particular goal, it begins to perceive anything beyond the limitation as impossible and unattainable. But once we revise our goals, broadening our perception, we remove the limitations we've put on ourselves. We expand our horizons.

How we characterize our own lives oftentimes puts constraints on us that we barely recognize. Seeing those houses was a life-changing experience that laid the foundation for a new transformative mindset. I thought about myself as a young boy, what I believed growing up, and what I now believed was possible for me. I grew up in a place where homes cost around \$100K to \$200K. If you really wanted something prestigious, there were options ranging from \$300K to \$500K, all of which were considered mansions. I was a pretty simple guy growing up, so I figured that a \$200K home would be sufficient for myself when I was older. In life, as we acquire earthly possessions like cars, clothes, homes, toys, and so on, our home is typically the most expensive purchase of them all. So, I grew up thinking that I needed to make at least \$250K to afford the type of lifestyle I envisioned. Meanwhile, I didn't realize that adopting this goal also meant I was putting a cap on my thinking, limiting my possibilities. But across the country in states like California, another young boy my age was growing up seeing homes with a baseline of \$1 million, making the same calcula-

tion as me to determine the baseline amount of money he'd need to save. These two young men grew up with a shared vision of the same earthly possessions, yet they would adopt entirely different mindsets of what's possible, as a direct result of the environment they were exposed to. Where one would see \$1 million as only the beginning, the other would see \$1 million as unattainable. Many people—including me—have sold themselves short with their idea of what's possible for their life, simply due to their context and exposure. This moment served to drastically expand my perception and perspective on my reality, filling me with exhilarating energy to reach for more in life.

Exposure is a vital part of connecting you to your destiny, and some people may struggle with getting exposure to different ideas, resources, and environments, due to the mindset and environment they're subject to. I was able to get exposure in my life by keeping an open mind and being fluid, moving with opportunities as they arose. If you struggle with getting exposure, you may wish to consider volunteering your gifts and talents for particular causes that are attractive to you. Even through your work you can volunteer to take on additional projects that appeal to you, that may give you a new perspective on things. You may want to travel to diverse locations outside of your current region to see how others live. The internet is a great resource for exposure, as well providing a vast amount of information to expand your mind.

I truly believe that, as humans, experiencing diverse interactions (that are not routine or monotonous) is how we thrive and expand our consciousness, stimulating the desired growth we yearn for.

So get out, get moving, and get connected.

WHAT'S YOUR VISION?



Swoosh! The wind swept in furiously as I opened the gym door. As I stepped out my future wife careered into my chest. She was looking down, digging into her purse for her gym pass. Stunned by her beauty, I smiled and said, “How are you?”

She answered with a huge smile, “I’m OK, thanks, sorry!”

We untangled ourselves, and I held the door open for her, asking, “What’s your name?” She smoothed her long flowing hair, looked worried, and then rushed into the gym without answering. It was getting late, and after a full day’s work I had to get home, so I couldn’t follow her back in to see if she was OK.

I’d been working out at the UFC gym for the last six months—since I’d arrived in California—but this was the first time I’d encountered her. I hoped our paths would cross again. The next day, in the middle of one of my longer back workouts, I looked up and there she was again. The entrance seemed to glow as she walked through the door. Mesmerized by her beauty once more, I suddenly found I’d lost the rhythm of my reps. Strange!

Twenty minutes later, with a towel around my shoulders, I could see her boxing class was taking a break. This was my chance. Let’s GO!! I approached her calmly and introduced myself again. We

laughed about our collision and exchanged numbers. I was thrilled, and left the gym walking on air. I couldn't wait for our first phone conversation. The rest of my day's routine seemed never-ending—dinner, shower, college work—but finally I was dialing her number.

The buildup to this conversation was really intense. I was filled with constant thoughts about this mysterious woman. Who was she? Why did she dazzle me so much? I'd only met her the day before, and she'd already turned me upside down! The night before I could only have imagined having a conversation with her, but now I had her number, I had the phone in my hand, and in a moment the dream would become reality. I was, as yet, unaware that this connection would forever change my life. Ring! Ring! Ring!

"Hello," she answered gently. We were both nervous, but we managed to break the ice and began sharing our personal stories. After half an hour of small talk, the easy tone came to a screeching halt when she dropped a big question. "So, what's your vision for your life?"

I was stunned and felt my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth. I had no response. What do I say? I wasn't ready for such a serious question, so soon. I spluttered a generic answer, "I wish to excel in my life and be successful in all of my endeavors."

Not totally put off by my response—though I could tell she wasn't all that impressed, either—she said, with grace, "I see, well whatever you decide to do I believe you will be successful, judging by the successes you've shared with me." Pheeww! I dodged a big one, I thought.

What I didn't know was that her question would resonate through my consciousness for years to come, challenging me to look within and discover the internal vision I was carrying inside.

I was busy at Intuitive Surgical (ISI) during working hours. I was learning all kinds of new things, it was truly exciting; the evenings and weekends were my own. This gave me valuable time to do some soul searching. Her question burrowed deep into my soul. I was disturbed by my lack of an answer. I thought I'd done a lot of work, examined my fears, and learned a lot about myself over the past few years. I was

free of the *model life paradigm*, and I knew who I was, I believed. But the confusion I'd been thrown into by that question showed me that I still had a lot to learn. I was only just starting out on my path.

There were a lot of rooms in my soul I hadn't yet dared to look into. Perhaps it was time. The room of "race, culture, heritage" was one I had so far ignored. I'd always thought of myself as a unique individual, unconnected and unaffected by where I came from. But as I started to think about it, I could see that I was a product of history, just as much as I was an "individual." My origins, and the color of my skin, had influenced my life chances and my experiences, even if I wasn't aware of it. Ignoring it, going forward, wasn't an option.

In order to get my vision for myself and my future clear, I would first need to examine my identity. Doing this, and getting a deeper sense of who I was, would enhance my self-worth. I began my search for true identity through the history of my people. The hunt was on, and I began to research thoroughly until I came across a few reputable historians of my own descent that could provide a factual, unbiased view of history. They showed me my culture and the world in which we exist through an unclouded lens. I began to digest hours and hours of content from seminars, books, and videos. Shockingly, layer by layer like an onion, the truth of my people's history and, more importantly, America's history, was revealed to me in a completely life-altering manner.

I vividly remember lying in bed in my Sunnyvale apartment until 2 or 3 in the morning, physically shivering as I reflected upon the traumatic history of the people I'd descended from. The knowledge transformed my existence. Of all that I discovered, the prevailing theme for me was that, despite all we had suffered and endured as a people, we were still here. We'd persisted through centuries of torture, enslavement, captivity, and injustice. Notably, in the United States in 2020, the US Census recorded that Blacks accounted for 12.4 percent of the population (41.1 million African Americans). Alternatively, the white population reported 235.4 million, accounting for 61.6 percent of the population. The drastic difference in these numbers implies that one population had (and continues to have) a clear advantage over the

other. Nevertheless, I understood that even with every government policy systematically fashioned against my culture, we have continued to prevail through the worst of times.

Digging deep and learning about the history of my people gave me a thorough understanding of my heritage, and deep compassion for those that had suffered.

Knowing what my ancestors went through changed me. I learned about my sub-Saharan roots and I stepped through the timelines of history to gather a more informed view of what had transpired with my people; and the reason why we show up today in the way that we do. We are spread throughout the world, and here in the United States, our identity has been stripped from us, leaving us lost and living in a manner that is not our own. This revelation made me feel connected to that great, tragic, epic past; it connected me to one of the greatest stories of survival the world has ever seen. Plugging into this made me feel grounded in a way that is hard to describe. I felt I knew more about myself because I knew where I came from. I found I had gained a better sense of my personal identity, meaning I was able to value myself more.

I took the pain and transgressions suffered by my ancestors and used it as fuel to launch my life into the next dimension. I want to highlight that, although “self-identity” may seem like an abstraction, exploring it was imperative for my growth as an individual; exploring and owning it showed me that it is much more than an abstraction. Coming to a realization of who I am and where I come from revealed another level of my being, and unleashed a new kind of strength. I felt my superpower was the same as my ancestors: the power to prevail against all odds. This equipped me with a mindset that was not unlike the one I had been developing ever since I started on the path toward athletic stardom, all the way back in the little league, when I realized I would need total commitment to get to the top. But now it was on a whole new level: although I would be tested from all sides, I knew I couldn't be broken. I would walk tall with my head high, knowing I was the descendant of a people that couldn't be broken, no matter what they encountered. I walk with the same conviction to this day.

The new self-belief I had unveiled led me to inventory my strengths. These fell into three different categories, I realized: gifts, talents, and skills.

- **Gifts** are an expression of our uniqueness, given at birth. They are meant to be given out to serve others. Getting to know our gifts can show us why we were put on Earth, and what our purpose in life should be.
- **Talents** are extraordinary natural abilities that can be developed, once we've discovered what they are. They are a bit like gifts, but they need attention and dedication to turn them into special abilities and roles.
- **Skills** are learned and developed over time. Anyone can learn a skill, but it takes talent to become extraordinary at something.

In short, a gift is always there and only needs us to recognize it. A gift can show us the areas in life where we might have a talent, but we need to nurture and develop the talent in order to excel. Both gifts and talents can show us the skills we should acquire if we want to make the most of our potential, and if we are to find a place in the world that will express, as fully as possible, our purpose. When all three are aligned, happiness and fulfillment will follow, as sure as the sun rises over a bright, green Earth.

Everyone has a gift. They are innate and no one is born without one. From the janitor to the CEO of a company, we all carry solutions to specific problems in the world; therein lies your gift.

Talents may be artistic, intellectual, or they may be more practical or social in nature. They can be used for the benefit of humanity or for personal gain. People may have a quantity of talents, which are then channeled, via our gifts, to serve the world. Joseph Strauss, chief engineer on the Golden Gate Bridge, used his talent to design one of the wonders of the modern world and pride of U.S. construction in the early 20th century. Dr. Martin Luther King's speeches famously brought to the attention of the world the inequality Black Americans

experienced in the United States during the era of the civil rights movement. He would go on to play a crucial role in changing the hearts and minds of millions through his “I Have a Dream” speech. He would not have been able to express his gift (solution: ending racial inequality) if he’d never had a talent (channel: speaking).

Skills are not innate. They are developed through training. We can learn as many skills as time allows. Skills ensure your talents are at their best to serve (or gift) humanity.

Understanding these three fundamental attributes will help us cultivate them alongside each other, to produce a self-fulfilled person of value. This will allow anyone, no matter their occupation, lifestyle, or living conditions, to feel, know, and understand their true worth and what they have to offer the world.

I covered a few pages with my gifts, talents, and skills. This gave me an enormous sense of empowerment that was unexplainable. “I found it!” I shouted, though I’m not sure why! I’m glad I wasn’t sitting in a cafe or library, or I would have been embarrassed. From that day on I began to live the identity of who I knew myself to be. I had unique gifts, talents, and skills, and I knew it in my bones for the first time. It was packaged into my DNA. Talk about a re-birth! On top of that, I had a history, now, one I knew about, one that anchored me to centuries of courage and fortitude. I saw my parents as an important part of that history; they took their place in the long, dignified lineage I had unearthed: there they sat, just one generation before me. I was their legacy, just as they were the legacy of all who came before. Knowing this made me feel strangely free to be myself. I didn’t feel limited or burdened by the past anymore. No *model life paradigm* or small town mentality. I was made by and charged with the nobility and energy of the past. My knowledge, reflection, and struggles in adulthood had set me free from the world’s identities. I could set them aside like a garment, unburden myself of their weight, and begin freely expressing my true self. And this, of course, meant I was free to change without any limiting influences, either within my psyche or “out there” in the world. I felt lighter than I’ve ever felt before.

All of this meant that I was ready to defog my “life goggles.” What

are they? You are probably wearing some. I bet you're so used to them you can't feel them at all—they are so comfortable, a habit so familiar you've forgotten what the world looks like without them (if you ever knew).

Don't think I'm being judgemental. God knows, I wore mine with every bit the same amount of unthinking comfort. I was even proud of them, though I couldn't have put that into words. Not only did they show me a world in which I was small and powerless, they also showed me a world in which I saw other people through the fog of my own fear, anxiety, and frustration. They made my own shortcomings, ignorance, and despair invisible. Magically, all of these things appeared in other people, or someplace far away from the sphere of my own responsibility. I couldn't change anything, because I couldn't see anything in me that I had the power to change. It was all "over there"—and that often meant that it was other people who appeared to be angry, or ugly, or ignorant. Not me; never me.

It was only when I started on the long, hard path toward real change and real understanding that the sensation of the goggles on my head became uncomfortable. They were coming between myself and the world as it really was; and for the first time ever, I didn't like it. It was incredible: as I began to find ways to clean the lenses, or lift them a little to look out from under them, I felt myself become a little happier, a little less judgemental. I felt myself more capable of having a positive influence on my own being, my own destiny. They started to become *really* uncomfortable. One day, I realized that I might even be able to take them off. Have I done that yet? I'm not sure, they are tricky things. Just when you think you're seeing clearly without them, you find out you're still seeing some things askew. Perhaps it is for others to tell you they are really gone. I have learned enough humility to know that I can't ever claim to see a world absolutely undistorted by my own interests, ego or bias.

I don't need to tell you that the goggles are just a metaphor or symbol. The point is that, as you grow, finding clarity of vision is crucial. This means two things: 1) seeing the world around you, and

others, clearly; 2) knowing and nurturing your own vision for your life.

Something that helped me with both of these aspects: being connected to the right people at the right time. You know your true friends. They are the ones who are brave enough *not* to tell you only what you want to hear. They will challenge you with the truth, but compassionately. Not to belittle you or to gain power over you. They will tell you truths because they want you to see clearly and to grow, practically, emotionally, and spiritually. This means that it won't always be comfortable to be with these kinds of people. But it's like drinking cold, clear water: it feels sharp, and isn't sweet or artificially flavored. It's not what you're used to and isn't pleasant in the way that most of us have become habituated to. But, if you have that spark in you that wants to become a little stronger, a little more free, you know that it tastes *right*. It quenches a deeper thirst, and offers real nourishment. Soon, this is the only thing you want to drink.

So, surrounding yourself with truth-lovers will help you develop a clear vision of "what's out there" and "what's in here." Your sight will begin to defog; you will see the world around you with new insight and impartiality, and you will begin to get a clear sense of your inner vision. To reach a new, higher level of self, you must face your internal shortcomings—working to overcome them—finally living enlightened with lessons learned from the experience.

So, you may ask, what exactly is "vision" and why is it important? Simply put, vision is the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom. It is very important that we all have a vision for our lives. When you apply vision to the future, you can create a mental picture that can be used to direct your actions.

Try this: hold an apple seed in your hand. What do you see? A seed? An apple? A tree? A whole orchard? All of these are held within the apple seed. This same exercise can be applied to your life: if you were to see an image of yourself, what would you see? Yourself as you are now? Or, if you have ambitions and aspirations, you may see yourself sometime in the future, in a different situation entirely. You may

even see yourself in the past. Whatever you see, there is important information feeding back to you in the image that arises.

Take some time to reflect. If you see a younger version of yourself (perhaps very young) then there may be something unresolved in your feelings about your past. Perhaps you still feel young, or stuck in an experience you went through at that time. It is worth asking yourself the question, *why is this the place my mind is going to?* If you see yourself as you are now, it may be that you are right where you want to be. What is the feeling that comes up alongside the image? This will tell you a lot. If it is uncomfortable, or painful, then it may be that you are stopping yourself from imagining your future. Once again, there is a lot of information to be won by reflecting on the way the exercise is making you feel. Lastly, if you see yourself in the future, it is likely that you are dreaming about the place you want to get to. Again, feeling into the emotion that arises alongside the image will tell you a lot about the quality and meaning of the image. If the feelings are vague, or even a little hopeless (as if it's a future you'll never really know) then you are probably creating a wishful future that is more about the discontent you feel in the present than about the future as a reality. If you have feelings of excitement, anticipation, hunger—with a little fear thrown in, perhaps—then this is a future that may be right for you, and that you may be able to bring about for yourself.

None of the images that arise for you are “right” or “wrong”; what's important is that they are giving you valuable information. Use your reflective powers to understand them and act upon them. With visions of the future, let's take another step.

There is a way to get serious about your visions. When you do, you will amplify your ability to manifest your vision. An exercise I like to do frequently is to sit silently in my room, in darkness. This allows my brain to activate creative powers and heighten senses that normally lay dormant in my natural operating state, in the light. Research has proven that the brain “reroutes” normal sensory pathways to adapt and respond to the environment and the signals it encounters. When signals from the outside world are reduced, it is able to integrate past experiences and access resources for healing, insight and inspiration

that it is usually too busy to engage. Through this exercise I'm able to easily project a vision of my life in my mind. After about 10-15 minutes, I pause and document as much of the vision as I can in my journal. I believe that anyone can do this, because the vision is within you, not outside of you.



FINDING YOUR INNER VISION

Follow these steps to help you find your inner vision:

1. Find your quiet space

Turn off the phone, shut off the computer and TV. Find a safe, quiet space where you won't be disturbed. This place can vary from person to person. For some it will be their bedroom, bathroom, closet, or car, and for others it may be some specific place in nature, such as a trail, mountain, or near water. Whatever it may be, find *your* quiet space. If it's indoors, you might like to make it special, so that it's inviting and you'll have what you need for next time. A scented candle, perhaps, or a cushion and blankets. Make it clean and clutter free. This helps you get into a calm and caring frame of mind. Many of us live in small apartments, or with families, so you might only be able to create a temporary space for yourself. This is OK, all you need is something that means "this is my quiet space" for you: a candle, a mat, prayer beads (found in many faiths), a special blanket for your shoulders, or even your favorite soft toy—all of these things can get you into the right headspace.

2. Press pause

Most people have minds that run a hundred-miles-a-minute, analyzing, thinking, and ruminating. On top of that, we live in a very visual culture. We stare at one screen after another for work and communication, and then we sit down to "relax" in front of another screen that throws fast-moving images at us until we fall into bed, exhausted and overloaded. No wonder so many of us find it hard to use our imagination or find our inner vision. There's barely any band-

width left for it. If we are to stand any chance of finding our vision, we must learn to “press pause” and STOP. Not just once, but regularly. How regularly depends on you, your lifestyle, and your desire to make progress. Start slow, but try to find time at least once a week, to begin with. If you can up this to twice or more a week, or even daily, then it will become a practice that will nourish and renew you in ways you can’t imagine. And you will get in touch with a sense of inner vision, inner calm, that you will never want to be without.

One more word about “vision” before we continue. You may not think you’re a visual person, you may think your mind doesn’t work in that way. Don’t worry. What I mean by “vision” is your *inner truth*, your *guiding principle*. Everyone has it within them. I might just as well use the words “voice” or “light” or “guide”. These are all the same thing, I’ve just chosen “vision” because it works for me, but don’t get hung up on that. Adapt my words to suit your own sense of how your mind works. You are creating space for your inner truth to speak or be seen. That’s all. Relax and let the practice work its magic. There really is very little for you to do but to pause, allow, and be receptive.

3. Center yourself. Breathe. Relax

I mentioned darkness. So, turn the lights out, draw the blinds, use a sleep mask or a wooly hat, or anything that reduces the light going into your eyes. If you’re not comfortable in total darkness, that’s fine. Any amount of lower light will do. Sit comfortably.

Be still. Relax. Breathe. Feel the air deepening into your lower abdomen. At first, you may find yourself controlling your breath, you may be forcing it to slow down. Gradually, let go, allow the “breath to breathe itself.” It will find its own natural rhythm, no need for you to try. Your mind will probably be quite busy to begin with. You may re-run a conversation you had earlier, or a moment of friction between you and a work colleague, partner or family member. “I should have said that,” or “How could they have done that!” may go through your mind. Fragments of old songs may come and go, or tomorrow’s shopping list will get written while you’re sitting. Just allow it all.

Congratulations my friends, you are officially meditating! It’s a common misconception that meditating involves stopping thoughts or

having no thoughts. Moments (or even extended periods) of this may arise, but it is not the goal. The most important things to do are these: bring your focus back to your body and breath when you are aware of getting lost in thoughts; keep a kind, caring attitude to what's going on in your experience. Accept it all, and don't judge. Don't get attached to anything that arises—stories, emotions, thoughts—just steer your mind back to the present moment, over and over again, gently.

Bringing your focus to your breathing, or to the physical sensations of the body, will keep you from drifting off into endless rumination, daydreaming, or dissociated states. It will keep you grounded. Whenever you notice that you have been off on a flight of fancy, or you've been re-running one of those old incidents, just bring your attention back to your body. Don't judge, don't get angry at yourself for getting lost. Just notice and re-focus. Do this as many times as you need to, but always do it kindly. Remember, every moment of noticing is a moment of awareness.

This last point can't be over-emphasized. Accept yourself as you are now. Don't judge, and don't punish yourself. The mind is only doing what it was made to do, what it has always done: working to keep you safe, to understand yourself and your surroundings. But there are times when it doesn't need to do this; when it is, in fact, unhelpful. Slowing it down is not easy, so don't treat it harshly. Kindness gets you further, faster, because it doesn't generate any extra resistance or negative emotion that you will only need to get past, in the end. So be lazy, don't bother making any extra stuff to process. Be kind.

As your mind quietens down, your vision will arise. Your soul will speak. Your mind space will declutter, creating room for the true "you" to step forward. Now you will begin to get a sense of your vision, your truth. If it comes to you in words, not images, that's fine. Sit and focus. That's all you need to do. Lean in and capture what is manifesting within you.

It may take a few attempts before you get anything like a clear sense of what your vision is. That's OK, don't be discouraged. Tuning

in is like any new skill. It takes a little time to get the hang of it. But it will come, when you are still and open.

4. Document your thoughts

I recommend allowing 15 minutes, minimum, for your session. You can spend longer, if you like, but it will take at least this for your mind to clear. After that time—or when you feel ready—stop and document the thoughts and messages you received during your time of reflection. This will allow you to reflect on these messages at a later time, connecting dots and allowing you to develop a good clear picture of your vision. Your most powerful recurring thoughts during reflection may be problems you're meant to solve, business ideas you're meant to develop, or world issues you're destined to resolve. For me, when I began doing this, I received recurring ideas around business and investments. Behind this was the need for financial success and stability that my family and I needed. When I was able to capture and document this as the major mission at that point in my life, I was able to see my way clearly. It was my life vision. I wonder what yours is, right now?

Your goals may also become clear to you during this exercise. Great! Write these down, and when the time comes for you to start creating a plan to turn goals into reality, you will have them ready (we will do this in Chapter 6).

5. Share your vision (optional)

Occasionally I recommend connecting with a trusted partner, friend, or counselor with whom you can share your vision. Someone who knows how to listen and ask the right questions; who respects you, understanding that sharing your innermost thoughts can make you feel vulnerable. This will allow for valuable feedback that may serve as confirmation for your vision, or voice. You already have the answers within you, and it's not a necessity, but sometimes you may need a little help to make sense of, or reassure you about the ideas you're processing inside.

It takes time to find your inner vision, especially if you've ignored it or pushed it to the side until now. The more you listen—with patience—the easier it will be for you to tune into your intuition, your

heart and soul. Following your inner guide will lead you to the truth, which will show you what's best for you. Tuning into your innate wisdom will simplify your life. Decisions will become easier, because you will see when things aren't in alignment and don't support your vision; you will be able to identify them and make a conscious decision not to waste valuable time and energy on things that don't support your vision. In the end, this helps solve problems easier and gets you to living a life of greater happiness, success and fulfillment.



AT OUR PUREST, we are all simply spirits. All forms of life on Earth consume and transmit energy, be it “bad” or “good.” The universe has a profound way of responding to us in all aspects of our lives. For every action there is a reaction. Whether we are able to see it or not, there is always cause and effect. Actions, thoughts, and ideas that we generate are energy-based, and transmit electrical signals. Through electrical impulses we transmit our own “positive” and “negative” energy, causing us to attract or repel people, opportunities, and various things in life. I believe that, by walking in pursuit of my destiny with a pure heart, transmitting positive energy despite my past, I was able to attract and become connected with my spouse, who was needed to help me unlock my vision for my life through her challenging question: *What's your vision?* I believe that, through being in a place of openness and walking towards growth, I transmitted energy that showed I was ready for the next phase in my life.

Our destiny is connected with and through other people. We are meant to be connected to a partner, friend, or colleague that will help us get there. They are uniquely developed and ready to help you when you have risen to where you need to be. This person for me was my wife. Her energy and joy resonates deeply with me at the same levels at which I operate. I know, beautiful, right? This is why I believe it's vital to resonate energy that attracts the right people that pay tribute to your vision. The Law of Attraction explains this concept precisely by showing that positive or negative thoughts bring positive or nega-

tive experiences into a person's life. The belief is based on the idea that people and their thoughts are made from "pure energy" and, as energy, can attract like energy, thereby allowing people to improve their health, wealth, or personal relationships.

Often, I do a simple "temperature check" on my energy and what I'm transmitting. I ask myself the following questions. You can use this, too.

PERSONAL TEMPERATURE CHECK

1. How am I feeling right now?
2. Am I looking at things with a positive or negative view?
3. What's causing me to have the current positive or negative view?
4. Is there anything I need to change or work on to improve my view? If so, what is it, and how can I begin to take action?

Doing this temperature check will allow you to stay tuned into how you're really feeling, right now. It will also help you become aware of the kind of energy you're transmitting to others. Are you giving out light, clear, positive energy? Are you stuck, frustrated, or low, and giving out murky, darker energy?

I invite you to investigate this clearly, with compassion for yourself. Piling more judgment, anger, or sorrow onto yourself will only make things worse, for yourself and others. Only love and kindness will rescue the situation. So, look with curiosity and kindness, and be honest about where you find yourself. With truth as your companion, you will be able to make changes, however small, that will turn things around or improve your energy.

Never, never think that a small change isn't worth it. Even the tiniest positive change is to be celebrated. Just as the mighty oak tree starts life as an acorn, so you may be starting with the smallest, most imperceptible of changes. Maybe it's getting into bed 10 minutes earlier

than usual, or drinking a glass of water when you would usually have sugary soda or alcohol. Maybe it's simply choosing to notice something good, rather than noticing all the dreadful, unlucky things you usually notice. But don't underestimate such a change. From these humble beginnings great revelations, revolutions, and rebirths are born.

With each positive shift, you will notice that you are becoming more empathic and aware of your impact on others. You will realize that your impact on the world *matters*. Ensuring that your messaging, verbal and non-verbal, is transmitting clear signals of benign intent will create a positive relationship between yourself and the world that has far-reaching benefits. Remember, what you give out is what you get back. This will empower you to become ultra-effective as your work toward your vision, removing unnecessary distorted communication and distractions.

So, I will leave you with two questions, for now:

WHAT ARE YOU FOCUSED ON?

WHAT ARE YOU ATTRACTING?

GO(AL) FOR IT!



“Fourth and long baby, it’s my time,” I thought as I squatted down in my three-point stance. It was late in the fourth quarter and my high school football team had our opponent backed up deep in their own territory. The ball snapped and I plowed through the offensive tackle like a wrecking ball. As the punter caught the ball I rushed vigorously towards him. Kaboom!—the punter kicked the ball with all of his might. I leaped as high as I could, and *Voilà!* I caught the ball in mid-air. I took off like a rocket. *To the 20, to the 10, to the 5. Touchdown!* The crowd went crazy as I scored my first defensive touchdown to secure a win for my team. Talk about a nostalgic memory.

In life, we may have a clear vision of our goal, just as I did running toward the touchdown post all those years ago. But in order to actually get there we must hit certain key markers, which show us how close or far away we are from realizing our vision. Setting goals may be intuitive for some, but rather a chore for those who don’t know how to set and manage goals effectively.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a goal as “the object of a person’s ambition or effort.” I like to view goals as monumental checkpoints; on your way to your ultimate goal, there will be lots of

smaller challenges, modest goals, along the way. When you reach a goal, stop for a moment and realize that you've achieved a portion of your vision. That's no small thing, so stop at this checkpoint and breathe the air. Noticing your arrival there gives you a sense of reward and encouragement to continue working toward the big vision.

You may wonder what all the fuss about setting goals is, anyway. Well, let me ask you: Are you where you want to be in life? If your response is no, then here's another question: Are you doing anything to reach that destination?

If you're not, why not? This is, perhaps, a bigger question than the two that came before it. Finding out *why* you're not actively heading in the direction you want to go—and this doesn't have to be about work or money, it applies to every area in life—is the key to removing those blocks and limits that may be holding you back. If you've been paying attention, you will guess what I'm going to say about the way you will ask yourself this question. You guessed it: with kindness, without judgment, and without punishing yourself.

Are you worried that, no matter what goals you might set yourself, you're not clever enough, or good enough, or strong enough to achieve them? Do you feel, somewhere inside, that you don't deserve anything more than life has already given you? Are you afraid of being found out as unworthy, if you dare to challenge the limits of who you think you are, and what you think you can do? Do you feel like you don't have the support you might need to grow and to overcome your fears? Maybe you feel like there's really no point in trying, because your luck is always bad, and good things only happen to other people.

The stories that create these thoughts and feelings are strong, and you'd be surprised how many people live most of their lives under the weight of them. Some don't even feel the weight on their shoulders, pressing them down. I can't know exactly what those stories are, and I'm not about to tell you that you can just step out from under them and be free. But what I *can* tell you is that you are never powerless, and it is never too late to begin your journey toward a place where you can walk unburdened by them. It's not easy, I admit that, but with

every step you take you will feel a little lighter, a little stronger. And that's worth it, wouldn't you say?

So, if you don't have any current goals, then it's time for you to start setting yourself one or two. Without wanting to sound harsh, it's worth considering that, if you don't begin to live and do things differently, you will just keep on getting the same results over and over. You will stay under the burden of limiting thoughts and feelings. It's also worth realizing that, in almost every case, those thoughts and feelings are not really yours. I mean, they didn't come from you. You were born free and pure, you were a fresh life, straight out of the arms of God, and you had nothing but joy and unbound energy in you. So, what happened? Through no fault of their own, and because of their own circumstances, other people in the world taught you to think of yourself as limited, or unworthy, perhaps even "bad." The *model life program* kicked in, and that small town mentality did its work, too. As I say, none of this is anyone's fault, it's just that the pain and damage people carry tends to get passed on.

Goals can help you work with all of this. Goals are rather important because they provide us with a sense of purpose and direction. An important thing to understand is that there's no point setting yourself a goal like "I'll be president of the United States by Christmas," or "I'm gonna be as rich as Elon Musk in six months," or even "I'm gonna become the life of the party" when your struggle is with social anxiety. Start small, and start with something that will make you feel better about yourself. It might be going to the cinema by yourself, or putting in for that promotion you want but don't know if you're ready for, or it might be as modest as eating a healthy dessert rather than a sugary one.

When you set an achievable goal, you give yourself a target to work towards, stimulating motivation and focus. And when you achieve it, you get a well-earned boost, a little hit of pleasure. You deserve it, and if you use the "checkpoint" pause I described above to maximize this, it will boost you even more. This, in return, allows you to make the most of your time and gives you a sense of meaning. When you feel there is something meaningful to do, your energy rises and you feel

like life is worth living. Change is possible. This is the gift of even the smallest goal achieved.

I can't say it enough. Do this kindly, and don't punish yourself if you don't achieve the goal on your first attempt. You may fail, but there is no *failure* here. Have you heard the story about the man who drove down the road and hit a big pothole? "Who put that hole there?" he says, while pulling over and assessing the damage to his car. The next day, he drives down the road and hits the same pothole. "Damn, someone ought to fix that hole, it's dangerous!" he thinks, after kicking his tires again. The next day, same thing. "For God's sake, I'm getting sick of this!" he says to himself. By now, his car's suspension is shot, his tires are worn, and he doesn't know what to do. Day after day, he drives over the pothole and out, cursing. Until, finally, on a particularly fine morning, he enters the mouth of the road and pauses. "Mm," he thinks, "maybe today I'll drive down a different road." He turns his left blinker on and glides down a road he hasn't noticed before.

It's hard doing something new. You keep being drawn back into old ways. Like the man in the story, you keep on hitting the same hole. You can't think how you're ever going to not do this thing. And then, by the grace of love and life itself, a little spark lights up and you realize *you have a choice*. You set yourself the goal of doing something—even a little thing—differently. You fail. You get up. You fail again. You get up, and this time, lo and behold, you make it! Oh, the joy! Wow, if I can do this thing, maybe I can do that thing! And what have you got? A virtuous circle, as I mentioned before.

Everybody fails. Everybody. The key is, don't sweat it, and don't sink into anger and pain. Just get up and try again. If you're being too ambitious, scale things down a little and set yourself an intermediate goal. You will make it when you give it your best, with kindness and positive energy. And one good thing leads to another. One goal met leads to another, and another. This is the best way to get free of those fears and stories that have held you back for so long. You will smash through them eventually. Every step forward makes that more and more inevitable. If Thanos said he was "inevitable," then so is this

(Thanos was the villain in the Marvel movies, in case you're not into superhero stuff). It's a law of the universe. Positive change gets you free, and there is no such thing as a positive change that is too small.

In my youth, I wasn't taught much about goals, but I was taught the essence of hard work. As a teen, my father, brother, and I spent countless hours working on various labor-intensive work projects. I was a very curious kid, and asked many questions. I remember asking my father why he did all the different work he did. He simply responded, "As a man, if you don't work, you don't eat, and you guys like to eat, so I have to work. I want you and your brother to learn what real work looks and feels like, but as you grow older, I want you to be different. I want you to put your minds to work, not your bodies." Utterly confused by this, I put it aside.

But my father's unfathomable statement continuously replayed in my mind, especially when I found myself in challenging conditions. *Let my mind work for me.* My father's voice visited me as I labored at Discount Tire, out in the North Carolina elements in all seasons—from the sweat-drenched summers to the shivering, teeth-clenching winters. I began to understand what my father was getting at. I remember reaching my wits' end, one treacherously cold, snowy day. I was the only technician forced to work during a huge snowstorm. I was frozen from the cold and overwhelmed by the customers who packed our parking lot in search of new tires to help them weather the storm. It was then I had what I call a "Doomsday" moment. There was no one there to help me with the labor, only the store manager who was handling all the customers. So, I literally worked on every car, single-handedly. This experience drove me to my tipping point, and I vowed that from that moment on—whatever it took—I would commit to working with my mind and not my body. I set myself my first, and perhaps most important goal.

I started with a vision: I pictured myself in a clean, warm, modern environment. I was using my intelligence, not my muscle, to figure out a solution to a problem that was well worth the effort. I didn't know what I was doing, exactly, but I could see myself clearly, surrounded by people who were doing something similar. They were

working on something sophisticated and helpful. I was an important part of the team. We were fulfilled, valued, and well paid. This was more than a nice dream to take my mind off my frozen hands. It was a promise to myself that I would get there. It might take a few years and a number of stepping-stone jobs, but this was my future, I was convinced.

I thought about my first steps. As you know from Chapter 2 and 3, I trained in the military, then earned my agent's credentials and went into the insurance business. From there, I had my period of military deployment, and then the fateful conference at Virginia Beach that led quickly to the job in surgical robotics at ISI. And there I was—sitting in a clean, supermodern office, working up solutions to surgical-engineering challenges that would change people's lives. This was the dream made flesh, the vision made concrete.

You can do this for yourself. It will turbo-charge you on your journey towards your goals.

ACTIVE DREAMING EXERCISE

This could also be called “visioning” and has been used in various settings, as part of life-coaching, counseling, and meditation among others. It fits perfectly alongside Law of Attraction ideas and could also be said to play a part in the traditions of prayer and reflection from all around the world.

1. Picture yourself where you want to be

What is your ultimate goal? Do you want a totally different kind of work? Do you have an artistic dream, such as becoming a singer? Are you held back by a phobia or anxiety, and want to conquer it? Maybe you're neurodiverse and want to learn to do something you haven't done before, independently. Whatever it is, sit down in a place where you won't be disturbed, and picture yourself doing that thing. Make it as vivid and detailed as you can. Picture the room, the concert hall, the workplace. See the colors and objects around you. Create the vision in your mind, as fully as you can.

2. Feel it

Now, go one step further and *feel what it's like to be there, achieving your goal*. How do you feel? Excited? Content? Powerful? Happy and smiley? Appreciated and valued? Find your way into the emotion, feel it in your body. Smile if you want to—this is good, neurologically there is almost no difference between an imagined event and a real one (did you know that musicians who imagine themselves playing a melody actually improve their ability to play that melody? Their neural pathways are strengthened simply by picturing themselves playing their instrument). Really get into it, create the feeling within you.

3. Look back

Stay in that future place. Ask yourself, “What did I do to get here?” You don’t need to be too detailed here, but the more specific you can be, the better. If you enjoy singing but have never found the confidence to sing in front of anyone, perhaps you will picture yourself having lessons, or joining a community choir. If you want a different career, perhaps you will see yourself signing up for a training course, or going back to school. If you want to get all the way across town on your own, and go into that shop, then see yourself scheduling your ride on the Uber rideshare app. You get the idea. Your goal might need multiple steps, or just one. Give yourself a clear sense of the chain of smaller achievements it took to get you to the big one.

4. Know

This is an important step. Take all you’ve imagined and felt, bundle it up together and press it into one clear, strong thought: *this will happen*. You’ve just experienced it, you’ve time-traveled to see yourself in the future, living that reality, so it’s going to happen. It’s more than a wish or daydream. It’s a fact. Know that, whatever obstacles appear to stand in your way now, *they are the things that aren’t real*. Your goal is real, and your success, because you just got there. You are free, you can choose, you can act.

5. First step

Now, come back to the present time. Think: what was the first step that started you on your journey? Right, *that* is where you’re going to start today. You’re going to start researching the colleges that run that beginners course. You’re going to ask your friend who is in a choir if

they have any open places. You're going to buy some whole grain flour and look for online recipes for organic banana bread. Your goal could be big or small, it doesn't matter. They all start with a first step. One last, slightly corny-but-true saying: *every winner was once a beginner*. Don't judge yourself for being at the bottom of the ladder. Even Steve Jobs (one of Apple's founders) was once a college dropout hiking through India, wondering what he was going to do next. After seven months of meditation, he returned to the States with a new sense of purpose. He joined Atari, started designing circuit boards, and the rest is history.



LIKE MY EXPERIENCE, you will learn that it doesn't take much to break through your own particular "glass ceiling." A clear plan, built on the foundation of a visualization or "active dream", is all you need. Start with a simple, meaningful goal, if you want to practice before moving onto something bigger. Set smart goals that are specific, measurable, and achievable.

Don't just use your rational mind. Use your imagination, your "somatic" (bodily) sensations and senses. Use your whole being—that's what the exercise above is inviting you to do. This will allow you to break free and enter a new dimension of your becoming. I found that making changes in my life took discipline and sincere effort. It will also take discipline and effort for you too. But it's worth it. What else are you doing this weekend, huh? If we sincerely desire it, we are all capable of experiencing growth. I know for many of us it may take that back-against-the-wall moment, when we get fed up and say enough is enough. I must change. That's how it was for me. It took me being pushed to the limit at Discount Tire to start moving toward change.

I recognized in my many struggles a key pattern that led to change. Anyone who wants to push beyond their current limits will find the following steps powerful, even life-changing.

FIVE STEPS TO CHANGE

1. Draw the line

Get fed up. Whatever it is—a habit, something happening at work or at home, an element of a relationship—the first step along the road to change is a full, honest experience of your dissatisfaction with it. This isn't the same thing as getting angry or resentful about it—these emotions are a sign that you're not fully experiencing or allowing your dissatisfaction. There's a resistance there, if that's what you're feeling. They are signs that, somewhere inside, you don't believe change is possible. Reactive emotions like these can be barriers to change. What I'm talking about is a clear perception of a circumstance that is not serving you, not making you happy or giving you the respect and freedom you deserve.

So, if you're feeling uncomfortable, uneasy, or upset about something, investigate it. Reflect on it. Use the "Finding Your Inner Vision" exercise from the last chapter. Feel into what's going on for you. This can take courage and a little practice, but keep going. Soon, you will begin to get a clear picture of what's happening that isn't nourishing you. Once you have a clear understanding of this, you can move onto the next stage, which is. . .

2. Think critically

Thinking critically is what spurs action. Without this, all goals and aspirations are nothing but empty whispers. Until we think critically, and in depth, about what is missing and what we need, we can't map out the road to our goals.

What does it mean to "think critically"? It means exploring our own situation, using the best of our intelligence (cognitive and emotional intelligence) to understand what is going on and what a different, better situation would look like. So, with a mindful sense of becoming "fed up" with what's going on, you can now reflect upon the changes needed to create that new reality. A reality within which you are being heard, supported, and given the freedom and power to live more truthfully, more happily, more in harmony with yourself.

You can use the "inner vision" exercise again, or you can find other

ways to get there. A long run, or spending a few hours on your own, often does the trick for me. Doing something a little out of your usual routines is a great way of prompting new ideas and new understanding. When you jog yourself into a new, unfamiliar space, you may find that new dimensions open up within you, and new thinking becomes possible.

I find that using a combination of my “will” and my “intuition”—my “head” and my “heart”—is the best route to understanding. This employs the strengths of your rational, intentional self, and your more mysterious depths, to their fullest extent. When you realize these are not opposing faculties, but complementary ones, you will really start cooking on gas. There are many ways to do this, but allowing your mind the space and relaxation to work without you driving it or stimulating it is the best way to achieve it, I’ve found. Meditation, prayer, resting with as little “input” as possible, taking walks without listening to music or podcasts, doing anything to let your mind drift a little; all of these work wonders. After formulating and exploring your situation consciously, do any of these things (or anything that lets your mind and heart roam for a while).

3. Dream and aspire

Envision yourself doing or being what you desire, and truly believing you can do it. This is just as I described in the active dreaming exercise above, so I don’t need to say much about it here. Go back and read about it again, if you’re still a little unsure.

I would like to add something about self-doubt and say one more thing about the possibility of change, at this point. It doesn’t matter if there’s still a part of you that doesn’t believe you are strong enough, or “good enough” to change. These thoughts may run very deep, and may come from a personal wounding that took place a long time ago (perhaps when you were too young to do anything but believe it was true). But don’t let thoughts and feelings of this kind deter you from dreaming and aspiring, and from using the exercises in this book.

The simple fact—which is backed up by numerous scientific studies—is that “going through the motions” of any positive-thinking exercise will change your inner landscape, without fail. It may not feel

like it the first few times you do it, but every time you do it, you are transforming your brain. It is an established fact that the brain and its neural pathways are “plastic”—meaning they are capable of changing and creating new pathways, regardless of your age, health, or any other condition a person may have been diagnosed with. A “neural pathway” is, simply, a line of connected nerve cells that has built up over time. When electrical impulses travel along this established thread, a familiar thought or movement happens.

Every time you do (or think) something you’ve done before you are reinforcing a neural pathway that, in everyday language, we call a “habit.” This is easy to do because the pathway is already there, and gets a little stronger with every repetition. When you do something you *haven’t done before*, or not done very often, your brain has to work a little harder to create a new route through its neurons (nerve cells) that will result in that action or thought. But, though it’s a little harder, your brain still comes through for you and creates that path. So, what do you think happens when you do that new thing (or have that new thought) for a second time, and a third? I’m sure you’ve guessed it: it feels a little easier. Why? Because your brain knows the pathway now, and starts to strengthen the pathway every time it is asked to do that thing again.

And there’s even more good news. Every time you do this new thing, have this new thought, the old “habit pathway” gets a little weaker, because it’s not being used. The new activity starts to become your new “habit” and gets rewarded with an ever-stronger neural pathway to make it easier for you and your brain to do it over and over. So, whether it’s yoga, knitting, playing an instrument, meditating, going out and being sociable, or replacing negative thoughts with consciously positive ones, you will get better and better at it, and it will feel easier and easier, every time you do it.

This is what’s known as the brain’s “plasticity.” Amazing, isn’t it? So, if you feel reluctant or resistant, or if you feel like there’s no point in trying, because you’re not good enough and you’ll never change, I’m here to tell you that *everyone can change*. It’s science, and you’re human, and that means you can change.

This is a rather long-winded way of saying: *keep trying, even if you don't believe it will work for you*. You don't have to believe anything I say in order for these exercises to work. That reluctance, or cynicism, or despair you may be feeling—that's just those deep grooves of habit in your brain speaking. Do something new, or have a new thought, and change begins to happen. It's not magic, it's just the way the brain is made. Yes, it feels hard to begin with, and change that you can actually *feel* seems impossibly far away. That's alright, you don't need to punish yourself for having these thoughts and feelings, and you don't need to give up because you're not "doing it right" or approaching it with the "right attitude." Just let those thoughts be, and do the exercises. Do the *new* thing. I guarantee you change is happening, and before long you will feel it.

So, dream about the new you; imagine the world when the situation that's holding you back is resolved, and feel how it will feel. Do the "active dreaming" exercise. Having used the "think critically" step to understand what needs to change, put yourself in that future place when the change has become reality. The imagination is far more powerful than you think. Don't just use it to enjoy the next hit series on Netflix. Modern life has done a job on us: it wants you to think your imagination is only good for "entertainment". It's not. Revolutions begin in the imagination, be they personal or political. Your imagination is your awesome instrument of change. *Use it. Claim it.* Take it back from the entertainment machine. Grasp it like your own personal sword of destiny. You are the warrior, and you have the power to change everything.

4. Take action

Simple, this one. You've got clear about the unhelpful situation, you've worked out what needs to happen to bring about change, and you've used your imagination to get the fullest picture and feeling for what the outcome of that change will be. So, all that remains is for you to *act*. Having prepared the ground and thought it through, your action can now be focused, intentional, conscious and clear; not haphazard, chaotic, and potentially hurtful or harmful to others.

This last point is important. If the change you're seeking to bring

about involves others, whether in your close relationships, your professional life, or in some other situation involving other people, understanding the roles of others and the effect you will have on them when you act will help you behave compassionately and ethically.

Blaming others gets you nowhere. It may be that your difficult situation is caused by the behavior of others. They may be restricting your freedom, making your professional life stressful, or they may be acting in a way that's harming you. Even if this is the case, remember: their behavior is a result of their own false perceptions, hurts, and limited understanding of themselves. They are not evil or bad. Get yourself free of them, change the way you interact with them, use the processes that may be in place to protect you (if it's in the workplace); but don't blame them. Anger, blame, and hatred only bind you to the problem, it never gets you free. Use the "think critically" stage to understand what's going on and what needs to change. Communicate this clearly, if your situation allows it (this may be possible if the difficulty lies in your personal relationships). There may even be a welcoming response from the other person involved. They may be aware that something's not right, too, and they may be able to bring their own understanding, creativity and compassion into the situation to help you resolve it together. In my own life, I've been surprised and deeply moved, more than once, at the response I've had when I've been honest about myself. There is, quite often, more emotional intelligence and kindness out there than you might think, and the truth brings it out, when it's spoken without blame or anger.

So, take action; consciously, decisively, kindly.

5. Take stock

This last step will probably happen without you having to think about it, but it's worth saying a little about it, and making it into a stage in this exercise, because its benefits can be far-reaching.

After going through the previous stages, you may wish to pause and ask yourself, "How did that go?" Perhaps you will recognize that you got the change you were hoping for. It all came together and—*Boom!*—you're golden! If so, that's amazing, go you! Or, you can see that *some change* happened, but not everything you envisioned. Well,

that's still a win for you, and it's quite likely that another go around, when the time is right, will bring about more positive change. Take the win you got, celebrate it and appreciate it, and know that change is possible when you act consciously.

Then again, you may find that, despite your best efforts, the situation is the same as it was. No change. Sucks, for sure. But, as painful and disheartening as it may feel, I invite you to stay as positive, creative, and agile around it as you can. I would be very surprised, if you were to step back and take a look at your experience, and the experience of any others involved, if you didn't learn anything. Use the "think critically" stage to review what went on. How did you act? Did you find that, perhaps, you didn't really understand the situation, not in its entirety? Did the reactions and words of others surprise you, either for "good" or "ill"? Were there feelings, thoughts, and reactions within you that were hidden from you until you were in the thick of confrontations, conversations, or challenging situations? Taking stock of your experiences will help you understand your reactions, and the reactions of others, more fully.

This will give you the knowledge to try again. You can go back and repeat stages 2 to 5 of this exercise as many times as you need. Getting the change you want on the first attempt doesn't make you a winner of the competition, just as repeating the stages a few times doesn't make you a loser, or a lesser player in the game of life. There's no competition, and no prizes except your own happiness and freedom.

You don't have to try again immediately, if you don't want to. Taking some time to process what happened is no bad thing. This, in itself, is an intuitive "taking stock" and takes as long as it takes. Tune into your heart, your inner compass, and you will know when it's right for you to try again. Use the stages to guide you, and if in doubt, always come back to self-compassion and non-blaming to help you find clarity. This is an action plan for love, and if you keep that at the center of all you do, change will happen.

One last thing. You may think, "This is the change I want," but then another kind of change happens. This can be disconcerting, and it

shows that change can feel like a dangerous or unpredictable thing. A bit of a monster with a will of its own. Well, it's true that you sometimes don't get the change you were planning on. Unpredictability is a fact of life, no one can argue with that. My best advice to you around this is: stay open. Though it may not be the change you thought you wanted, it may be the change you need. And, even if it's painful, perhaps it was the change others needed, and that ultimately will bring about a new situation that is best for all.

I can't tell you that unexpected change will never come without discomfort or pain, but change that is delayed, denied, pushed away, or that you are constantly running from, is far worse. All it brings is a feeling of being frozen, and it means you are unable to feel or grow. Denial doesn't stop change, it only delays it and makes you less alive all the while you're trying to hold it back. It's exhausting too, take it from me. The only way, eventually, is for you to start acknowledging the situation, whereupon you will find yourself at step 1 of this process.

So, rather than holding your breath for another day, week, month, or year, why not start now?



LIFE IS CHALLENGING, I'll be the first to admit that. Sometimes it seems like the only way to make it to the end of the day is to keep your head down, hold your breath, and put your hopes and dreams in a little box, far away from view. I used to think like that. It was so hard to get past the obstacles life had put in my way, so hard to break through my own doubts and fears, that giving up trying seemed like the best solution for an easy life. Getting what I truly desired was out of the question. The MLP and my limiting beliefs held me down.

But, with a little help from others (as I described in the earlier chapters of this book) and a few sparks of courage that I didn't even know I had, I learned an important truth:

It takes as much energy to stay unhappy as it does to make change happen.

You might think that doing nothing, when you're unhappy or

unfulfilled, takes little or no energy. Not true. It takes a lot. In my life, I realized that I was married to routines and ideas that, for the longest time, I believed were keeping me safe. But I was battling with myself, physically and mentally. My body and mind were exhausted by it, and I came to realize that I was divided within myself, and I was expending enormous amounts of energy pretending I wasn't. If I kept on living like this, my health was going to suffer, and I could see that, in the long term, it would probably even cut my life short. It became clear to me that thinking positively, and working to bring about the kinds of changes I wanted for myself, would take no more energy than it was already costing me to think negatively, to stay in my current situation, and to pretend that change wasn't possible for me.

Also, I found that when I started to act, I healed the division I'd felt within myself. Almost overnight, I felt whole in a way I hadn't thought possible, and my energy expanded. It was like finding new space in my chest and lungs. I could breathe, and I felt so light it was as if I were skipping instead of walking along the sidewalks. I felt scared, yes, because I didn't know what I was really capable of, or whether asking for change would be destructive in some way. It might make things happen that I couldn't undo, or control, I worried. But the fear and worry were not nearly as bad as the heavy, defeated, sluggish weight I'd been struggling under for so many years.

So, I invite you to step out from under the weight that may be pressing down on you. It won't be easy, no, and it may not go exactly the way you think. But, when you choose positive thoughts, when you start to direct your energy toward growth, change, conscious intention, and when you take responsibility for your future and begin to take action, bliss and joy become your new companions. New energy floods in, and new spaces in your spirit open up. There may be fear, uncertainty, and a sprinkling of insecurity, but if you stay in touch with yourself in the ways I've described in the exercises of the last two chapters, you will stay in tune with yourself and only go as far and fast as you feel able. You will stay compassionate with yourself, and others, and you will bring in challenges that won't overstretch or harm yourself. Trust your inner compass and your inner vision, and

you will only find new strength, resilience, and freedom as you begin to welcome change into your experience. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Are you ready to live a life of bliss and true joy, crushing your goals?

YOU'RE GONNA NEED A PLAN



When everything seems to be against you, remember that an airplane takes off against the wind, not with it.

—Henry Ford

“Three... two... one, it’s now *your* aircraft,” the pilot said excitedly through my David Clark headset. Full of anxiety and more than a little fear, I grasped onto the wheel before me, my hands shaking. “You’re *flying*,” he crooned reassuringly, while instructing me on all the maneuvers I needed to perform to successfully descend the plane from 30,000 feet. The nerves in my body were exploding like fireworks on the 4th of July as I gazed into the open blue sky. I glanced down, mesmerized by all the instruments and gauges, like a kid in a candy store. “There’s no better view in the cabin than from where you are in the pilot’s seat,” he explained. As the plane soared through a sense-numbing cloud, we lost vision completely. I retained my composure as he told me to rely on my instruments to guide us through. After successfully leveling out at

18,000 feet, my flying journey came to an end. I relinquished the seat to the pilot and he prepared us for landing. I landed a new man, overwhelmed with joy, excitement, and some relief. The experience had been truly nail-biting. I had been presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fly an airplane, and instead of allowing fear to stop me, I took life—and the plane—by the wheel. Over the next few days, I could feel how my world had expanded. I felt braver than before, and I wanted to continue conquering my fears and doing my best in all the challenges life would throw at me.

My first flying experience was sort of impromptu. I was on a state-side training mission when the pilot invited me to get a feel for the plane. I was in the air as in-flight maintenance support, handling cargo loading, refueling, and monitoring overall performance of the C-130. The pilot thought it would be a good experience for me to see how she handled. I was amazed at how everything was precisely planned out, even before we got off the ground. Pilots are responsible not only for the planes they fly, but for the people and cargo they transport, of course. To ensure they are successful at delivering their passengers and precious cargo to their destinations all over the world, a vast amount of planning is done in advance to prepare for their voyages. They must take into account every little detail: starting location, destination, GPS navigation route, flight distance, speed, time, fuel requirements, cargo, and other vital mission information. They must also be prepared for all kinds of unforeseen events, such as adverse weather conditions, engine failure, in-flight medical emergencies, and lots more besides. Altogether, pilots and their support staff try to plan for every situation they can think of. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulates all aspects of civil aviation in the United States as well as over international waters. They set the guidelines on how flight plans should be documented and filed to ensure the safety of the aircraft, its occupants, and other airspace users, enabling flight tracking, search and rescue, and ease of air traffic control. The FAA doesn't require pilots to file a flight plan for every flight, but it is highly recommended, especially for those that will be conducted outside of

domestic airspace. Pilots flying under instrument flight rules (IFR), crossing air defense identification zones (ADIZ), flying internationally or across national borders, are required to file a flight plan. These descriptive plans allow pilots to get to their destination safely and on time, enabling mission success and protecting the well-being of all.

You could say that our lives work in the same manner. If we want to take flight, we have to plan. If we want to get off the ground, and if we want to avoid a chaotic crash landing once we're in the air, we need to understand quite a lot of things, and need to get quite a few things sorted out before we start down the runway. Only by doing this will we complete our life mission and turn our life vision into a reality.

Many people have great dreams and visions. If every dreamer I've spoken with had brought their dreams to fruition, the world would be crammed with artists, poets, rockstars, and Nobel prize-winning geniuses. The problem is, most people don't know where to start when it comes to manifesting their visions.

I've noticed that people tend to fall into three general categories when it comes to planning.

1. **The super-planner.** These charmed creatures plan everything they do. It seems to come naturally.
2. **The moderate planner.** They know a good plan when they see one, and make an effort to plan some things in life, but not all. They sometimes like to follow their gut or go with the flow.
3. **The phobic non-planner.** These guys run screaming from anything that smells remotely like a plan. They often have a strong emotional reaction or aversion to planning things in advance. Despite the chaos that sometimes ensues, they stroll down the pathways of life convinced that the only thing a plan ever did was to cramp their style, kill their buzz, or restrict their freedom.

Which of these are you? I happen to be a super-planner—guilty! I

guess my time as a committed athlete, together with the study I needed to do to get out of manual work, and then my military training, have all worked on me until finally I can see the benefits of planning and working smart.

The universe and everything in it is the product of master planning. That includes you. Even before He formed you in your mother's womb, God knew you, and consecrated you before your birth (Jeremiah 1:5). The Bible also reveals, in Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" My faith has taught me that every person is as unique and precious as a diamond, crafted to perfection and destined to shine. We come to Earth with everything we need inside of us to serve our purpose. We arrive with our gifts, our strengths, and our successes curled up inside us, so to speak, ready and waiting for us to unfold them and let them bloom, like a living, beautiful plant or flower.

That's not to say that our God-given potential will simply jump out of us without any effort on our part. No. Although we have been given this potential, we must choose a path for ourselves that allows it to emerge. There is a mystery, here, within the Christian faith as I've learned it. From one point of view, we are told that God has already planned our lives from beginning to end. According to Ephesians 1:3-5, God has chosen us within himself in the heavenly realms before the creation of the world and predestined us in accordance to his will. The keyword here is "predestined," which means a person has been given a particular fate or purpose before they have walked the path, or taken the decisions and actions that lead toward that end. Does that mean our choices are not free, and there's no changing the direction in which our lives are heading?

Well, the Bible also makes it very clear that we all have freedom to choose, and with it the responsibility for shaping our lives on Earth. We have all the gifts and potential we need to succeed and prosper, but it is up to us to understand ourselves, make the right choices, and steer ourselves in the direction of love, happiness, and fulfillment. So,

body and soul, we are designed by the divine hand, while we are also free and must shape our own futures. A mystery, for sure, but one that only makes life more miraculous, more marvelous, more revelatory. And, as I see it, the mystery makes it so much more important that we use our freedom to fulfill the potential given to us in this human life. If we are made to prosper and succeed, if we have a purpose to fulfill and all the gifts we need to get there, then it is in a very real sense our duty and responsibility to become all we were meant to be. This means coming to an understanding of who we are and what we are good at; it means stepping away from experiences, jobs, and even stepping away from people who don't support us to reach the goals that will make us happy and successful.

I just want to say that this is my faith; you may share it, you may not. That is fine. I am moved to share with you the way I understand this amazing life and our place in the universe, but if you have a different understanding, I respect that. You don't need to have a particular belief for the advice in this book to work. The story of my journey and my discovery of the formula for genuine change holds true, no matter where you are and what you believe. So take what you need from my words, and don't think for a moment that I would judge you for following a different faith, or having a purely secular outlook. My message in this book is for everyone.

This idea—we are designed and perfected long before we arrive on Earth—was intriguing to me, because I was well-versed in the design process as an engineer. The engineering process usually consists of identifying a need or desire for a product that will solve a problem that someone or something is experiencing. The need dictates a purpose for the product, way before the concept of the product is even drafted. Once preliminary requirements (e.g. specific planned details that the product is required to have) are drafted, prototype ideas are then outlined via computer-aided design (CAD) software. This provides a mold and physical representation of the product. During this process, the engineer relies upon the product specifications to define the type of power and strength the product needs to meet its

intended use or to serve its purpose. Therefore, long before there is a fully functioning product, the product's purpose, power, and identity are clearly defined. Upon successful product development, the product is then delivered to the customer for use.

This engineer's perspective gave me a deeper understanding of the purpose of life and God's plan for us. I recognized God as the ultimate creator and engineer of this world, and of everything on this planet that was created with a divine purpose, from the trees to the seas to the birds and the bees. Human beings are the ultimate creation made in God's image and likeness, and as such our existence has a unique purpose. I felt comforted knowing that God had already crafted a purpose for my life before I was birthed. While in the womb, He was developing a world for me, and in that world there was a void for me to fill, a particular problem for me to solve. A diligent engineer, he designed me to fulfill a need in the world. During those nine months my mother carried me, he was developing me with all the power and identity I needed to survive and carry out my purpose. After birth, I would inevitably endure a lot of growth and development, which is a bit like the revision process in engineering design. I would experience many life trials and tribulations—product testing!

Today, more than ever, I take time to strategically plan to help me meet those great goals we discussed in the previous chapter. Let's look at how you can improve your planning strategies. Remember the three categories of planner: super-planner, moderate planner, phobic non-planner? If you're a super-planner, then you've got it all going on and you can sit back for now—but I'm willing to bet nearly everyone reading this falls into the second and third categories. In which case, there is a lot you can do to improve your planning and discover just how helpful it can be.

Let's start with you, the hard cases, the non-planners. The first thing you can do is: ask yourself, honestly, what do you gain from never making a plan? This is the more important question than "why." For every choice we make in life, there is a perceived benefit or payoff. This also applies to behaviors that are unhelpful, even harmful. A

smoker gets the perceived benefit of looking cool, or boosting energy, or comforting themselves with a habit that, we know as an absolute fact, will shorten their life. Same goes for other substances and addictions. On a subtler level, some of our relationships may be less than helpful, even harmful to our self-esteem, opportunities, sometimes even our safety. These are very delicate matters, and I don't want to downplay how complex and serious some situations can be. But there is always a pay-off, a perceived benefit, no matter how illusory that pay-off may be. So, non-planners, what is your pay-off? Do you avoid having to make decisions, allowing (or obliging) others to do it for you? (Pay-off: you avoid responsibility, and can blame others if things don't work out.) Do you feel you're not good enough, and that any plan you make will fail? (Pay-off: you avoid challenging your perception of yourself.) Do you feel that life is boring when you plan for things, and that only uncool people will make plans? (Pay-off: you feel superior to others.) Ask yourself what you think you gain from being a non-planner. Use the inner vision exercise if you need help.

Now, I am willing to stake my reputation on this claim: if you put aside your identity as a non-planner and try my guide below, you will see the true benefits of conscious planning in a very short time. Loosen your grip on who you think you are, and what you think you gain. Have a go, and see what manifests for you. Non-planners, you can jump to the exercise right now, and get started.

Moderate planners: you're not such a tough nut to crack, are you? You know the benefits of planning, and you're not opposed to making a conscious plan and carrying it out. You've seen it all go right before. But do you sometimes forget, or think that "going with the flow" will do the job? Well, if you really want to make things happen, and if you want to aim for those goals that will profoundly change your life, then I respectfully say: you're going to need a plan.

I have learned that planning is essential for me, and the time spent on it is rewarded many times over. It may seem time-consuming, especially if it's new to you, but stick with it. It's not a one-shot deal. As situations and resources change, so will your plans. And, of course,

plans don't always turn out exactly the way you planned! I mentioned this when talking about change in the last chapter. Openness and a little resilience will take you a long way when the unexpected messes with your best-laid plans. This may cause a delay in your progress, or may even push you ahead of your schedule (always a good thing). The important thing is: stay present, stay honest, and stay in touch with your deeper self.

Personally, I really enjoy strategizing and thinking out my plans. There's something about the intuitive, creative magic of it that gets my gears turning, as I think about all the possible ways I can get to my goals. After meditating for a while, I make a list of all the various ways I can achieve my goal. A little more reflection, and I decide on the best feasible route that will get me there in the shortest amount of time, and without too many resources. I log all of this information in my journal for safekeeping and quick reference. I typically review my plans weekly to ensure that I'm on track with everything I'm working towards.

You can use the same framework I use. Not only will this help you get clear on the practical steps you will need to go through, but it also enables you to see the deeper meaning and value of your plans. Every plan must be married to a goal, which as we learned in previous chapters are the milestones on your journey to fulfilling your vision.

Here is my step-by-step guide to conscious, strategic planning:

Step 1: Define your goal

Now that you have spent some time listening to your inner voice and capturing those visions (see Chapter 4), you may have a list of goals ready to go—both short-term (3-6 months) and long-term (1-5 years). If not, don't worry. Go back to the "finding your inner vision" exercise and see what arises, or just spend a little time reflecting on the goals you want to achieve. If you're a non-planner, or an occasional one, or if you don't think of yourself as a multi-tasking type of person, it may be helpful to target one goal at a time.

So, write down your goal. Create a detailed picture of what that goal would look like. Use your imagination—remember what a

powerful tool this is—and use the “active dreaming” exercise if you like.

Example:

Goal 1: Save \$5,000

You need this amount to upgrade your car (which is about to give up the ghost). Or perhaps you want to give your child a good start when they go off to college in the fall. Whatever it is, picture yourself arriving at the goal, and the good things the money will bring. Make it as real as you can, and this will act as a strong motivator.

Goal 2: Switch Career

Maybe you don't feel that your current career is fulfilling you creatively; or perhaps, as I did, you feel that you've topped out and there's no more room for growth. Your current career path may simply feel stale, or there's something you can't put your finger on that's making you feel it's just not for you. So, picture yourself in your new career, whatever it is. Focus on the way you will feel in a job that nourishes you. Feel it in your body; the satisfaction, the confidence, the joy of meaningful activity in your daily life. Use the power of reflection, meditation, and deep focus to make your goal as real and fully manifested as possible.

Step 2: Define the steps you need to take

A destination is the culmination of the journey that led there. A goal reached is the culmination of a series of steps that were necessary to achieve it. How smooth the journey will be depends on how well the steps of the journey have been understood and planned for.

So, start by making a list of all the tasks you think will be necessary to reach your goal. To begin with, don't worry about getting

everything in the right order or even putting down a complete list of the tasks. This is your first draft, so just detail everything you can think of at this point.

Now, take a look at the list (you may want to take a break first or sleep on it). Is there anything missing? Would a different order of tasks work better? If it is a big goal, or something that isn't simple, you may need to do some research to get a clear idea of what needs to be done. Great, that's item number 1 on your list—research! Never underestimate a good research session; it may give you new ideas as well as clarifying what needs to get done.

Use your research and reflection to keep refining the necessary tasks. Maybe you need to save a certain amount of money, or maybe you are planning a surprise party for a friend, and you need to start messaging people to get involved. Maybe you want to go back to school, but need to complete deficiency courses before you are eligible for the degree program. Whatever it is, take your time and set out all the things you will need to do, as clearly as you can. Including timings can be helpful, showing you when things need to be done by, people to be contacted, and arrangements to be made.

Big goals can seem very daunting, but remember: every major goal is simply the product of smaller goals achieved. It helps me to think about them in this way. In a sense, there are no “big goals”, only smaller ones. You will start to feel like your goals are possible when you do two things: get clear on all the steps that are needed to reach your destination; and focus only on the nearest step you need to take. So:

1. “Brain Dump”—make a rough first draft of the steps toward your goal.
2. Research, refine, explore—work up your plan, make it clear and comprehensive.
3. Focus on the nearest, next step only.

You will keep your feet on the ground if you stay focused on the

most immediate task. And you will know where your feet are going if you've mapped out the whole plan beforehand.

Example:

Goal 1: Save \$5,000

Establish savings account with bank

Brainstorm ways to generate income (mow lawns, dog-sit, wash cars, etc.)

Decide on the gig for you (e.g. wash cars)

Decide savings amount and frequency (e.g. saving \$417 per month will amount to \$5,000 after 12 months)

Goal 2: Switch career

Brainstorm career options

Determine career path of choice

Research school options for education, or retraining path

Evaluate cost of tuition/retraining

Enroll in school/retraining course

Step 3: Identify resources

This could be treated as a part of Step 2, but I've given it its own section, just to keep things clear. You may find you've already factored this into your plan, but if you haven't, or if it's a bit vague, then the advice here will help.

1. Once you've got your exciting, comprehensive plan, you can create a side-list that identifies the key resources that are vital to your goal's success. The resources could be in the form of money, time, energy, or equipment.
2. Keep this list alongside the main plan, and then check off each item once you've acquired the resources, or completed the step that needed them. You could try this, or you could

incorporate it into your main plan. Why not use a color-coded “R” every time a resource is needed, so that you can see what you’ll need, and when?

Example:

Goal 1: Save \$5,000

- Car wash supplies \$100
- 5-10 hours per week

Goal 2: Switch Career

- Tuition \$20,000
- Study time 10 hours per week

Step 4: Prioritize & set deadlines

Some people get a bit freaked out by deadlines. They feel like a huge ticking clock is hanging over their heads, or that some terrible punishment is waiting for them if they don’t make a deadline. Well, I invite everyone to make friends with self-made deadlines! Here’s how:

1. Realistic deadlines—be honest about what you can do, and what you can’t. You might want to be an ultramarathon athlete, running 10K distances within a month, but you need to take stock of where you are now. You need to create deadlines for yourself that won’t break or demoralize you. The key to a deadline that works *for you*, not against you, is one that is grounded in honesty and constructive compassion for yourself. You will be challenging yourself, of course, but your deadline should be achievable, so start with a cool assessment of your abilities, time, and skills as they stand now.
2. Prioritize—when you can see what the most important task to do *now* is, you will start to see how the whole journey will

be accomplished, how it all fits together, and how you will get there.

3. See the positive effect of the deadline—let's face it, nearly every one of us spends a lot of time dawdling and daydreaming. We scroll through social media, clean and organize our work stations (even though we did it half-an-hour ago). We find all sorts of little things to do that aren't really necessary. This is where the deadline shows its magical power. You've worked on picturing your goal, and you've got a clear plan for how to get there, and now you've got your map of all the steps you need to take. If you put a deadline on the most immediate task—one that is realistic—it has the effect of clearing your mind and dissolving your tendency toward distraction and procrastination. You want to reach your goal, and your imagination has made it so real that you can taste it, so now *you don't want to waste time or get lost in distractions*. You are hungry for it, and so you get on and get things done. Every great novelist, entrepreneur, scientist, and athlete, knows the magic of the deadline, and they practice it every day. Now, so can you.

Example:

Goal 1: Save \$5,000 (based on initial savings deposit of \$500 and saving \$417 per month)

- January 30th—\$500 Initial Savings
- March 30th—\$1,334 saved
- June 30th—\$2,585 saved
- September 30th—\$3,836 saved
- December 30th—\$5,087 saved

Goal 2: Switch Career

- January 30th—Detailed list of career options
- February 30th—Career option decision

- March 30th—Degree & institution list options
- April 30th—Degree & institution option decision
- May 30th—Application submission

Step 5: Checkpoints

Checkpoints are like mini-goals leading up to the main goal. By adding checkpoints, you give yourself something to look forward to. Evenly space out your checkpoints, making them either bi-weekly or monthly, depending on how long it will take to reach your goal. What I mean by a “checkpoint” is a point at which you will pause and do two things:

1. Review—look back at your journey so far, and forward to where you are going. Simply pausing and understanding where you are, right now, can boost your sense of satisfaction and your energy. Knowledge is power, and staying in touch with your progress, your emotions, and your environment will make you feel in control of your progress and well-oriented in your present-moment experience.
2. Celebrate—congratulate yourself for the tasks you’ve completed, no matter how far you’ve come. Every step along the path is a victory for you, and shows you how much you can achieve when you make a strong plan and stay focused. Give yourself a little reward, whether it’s a cup of coffee, a walk in nature, or a chat with a friend. Your unconscious self—those parts of you which may still be vulnerable, or emotionally tender—will always respond well to a reward. Keeping those parts of you happy is essential, if you are to stay on track and not get hijacked by boredom, despair, or self-criticism. You are a complex, multi-layered being, so make sure you check in with yourself, keep looking after yourself with frequent acts of self-care, and treat yourself with the same compassion that you know others deserve. You deserve the same respect and encouragement!

Example:

Goal 1: Save \$5,000 (review savings quarterly to monitor progress)

- March 30th
- June 30th
- September 30th
- December 30th

Goal 2: Switch career

- 3 months—Final decision on new career direction
- 6 months—Enrolled in degree program
- 9 months—Degree road map)
- 12 months—Completed first course

Step 6: Monitor & update

This is a lot like “checkpoints” but is more general.

Take time to evaluate the progress you’ve made. If it’s a short-term plan, you could do it daily, or weekly for a longer-term plan. Mark completed tasks as done. It’s such a great feeling hitting that check-box. If needed, update your plan accordingly, to address tasks that you may have fallen behind with, or even need rerouting. Very few plans are perfect, so don’t worry if you find yourself changing it, here and there.

Above all, don’t use your plan to punish yourself or make yourself feel bad! A plan is made to help you, not undermine you. It is there to work for you, not you for it.



So, for the example goal to save \$5,000 in a year, I would make my plan like this. FYI, I try to keep each step concise, summarizing it in a few words (no longer than a sentence). You can choose your own style, of course, but this is how I would do it:

- Wash cars to generate extra money to contribute to savings
- Start a new account to keep the savings separate
- Make initial deposit of \$500 on January 30
- Save \$1,334 by March 30
- Save \$2,585 by June 30
- Save \$3,836 by September 30
- GOAL: Save \$5,087 by December 30

Here's another one. If I was planning to go back to school to retrain, to change my career:

- Research—find the course that's right for me: deadline 4 weeks
- Research institutions that offer the course: deadline 4 weeks
- Finances—make a tuition cost plan: deadline 4 weeks
- Apply to institution of choice: deadline 6 weeks
- Upon acceptance in program, set up graduation plan with academic advisor (all the courses and requirements needed to graduate)
- Make a clear calendar of study times—mark the times when you are able to study and work on assignments (this should be realistic and take into account your other commitments)
- Start classes and double up when/if possible to expedite the program
- Graduate with degree within 3 years
- GOAL: Obtain job in new career field

These are simple examples. As you begin, remember to be gentle with yourself, as plans will be fluid, and may need to change to accommodate your situation, which as we all know, can change quite unexpectedly. As Arthur C. Clarke said, "All human plans are subject to ruthless revision by nature, fate, or whatever one prefers to call the powers behind the universe."

We all have busy lives, but with organization and good planning, I know that anyone can achieve their goals. As a father, husband, engi-

neer, musician, investor, author, and businessman, I rely on strategic planning as the fundamental element to keep me happy, stress-free, and on track. It's my secret sauce! My gift for planning helps me manage my lifestyle and achieve my goals—even the new ones that come along. So, as you sit with these words and reflect on your goals, go ahead and make a *PLAN*. Whatever your relationship with the idea of planning, I invite you to let go of that old self, and bring yourself into a new, bright, exciting world of positive planning.

I DARE YOU... (you won't regret it!)

LIVE LIFE ON PURPOSE



Harnessing your distinctive gifts and talents for the enrichment of the universe is living according to the purpose for which you were created.

“W AYYYYLLOONNN!” yelled my mother, panicking. “Call for help!” she cried to my brother and sister. My body trembled and shook, and I was foaming at the mouth.

“Lord please help my baby,” she prayed as my neighbor came to help until the ambulance made it there.

“Stay awake Waylon, I need you to stay awake for me,” Mr. Evans said.

At the age of eight, I suffered a life-altering seizure one evening after school. My mother, brother, sister, and I had just picked up pizza from the local pizzeria. I had an immense headache. In retrospect, I realize I was a little overweight at the time and I consumed a lot of sugar, so I may have been borderline pre-diabetic. After picking up the pizza, I dozed off in the front seat of our burgundy Ford Windstar as

we rode home. The sliding door slammed shut as my brother and sister exited the rear, slightly bringing me back to consciousness. My mother politely said, “Alright Waylon, we’re home. Get up and let’s go in the house and eat.” Drowsy, I dozed off again as they all went into the house. A few minutes later, my mother returned and found me slumped in the middle of the front two seats with my eyes rolling, white foam spilling from my mouth.

Luckily, Mr. Evans next door was a diabetic, and he’d experienced frequent seizures over his lifetime. Fortunately, he knew exactly what to do until the paramedics arrived. I would like to acknowledge that without Mr. Andrew Evans, who I refer to as my guardian angel, I likely would not have made it that day, especially because the paramedics took a long time to arrive at our rural home. He kept me conscious and employed techniques with a spoon that prevented me from swallowing my own tongue. To God and him, I’m truly grateful, and will always remember and cherish him for saving my life. I believe that saving my life was a part of Mr. Evans’ life purpose, and I’m sure everything leading up to that day in his life prepared him for this critical moment. All of his own personal struggles and battles would equip him with the knowledge and skill needed to save my life. Wow, just when you think, why am I going through this or that in life, in the end it may not even be for you. It may be preparation for a moment in time and space that calls on you to be ready to serve your particular purpose.



OK, now where were we, again? OK I remember, yeah: I had begun to walk in the reality of most of my dreams as a new father, husband, engineer, musician, investor and businessman. Although I loved the taste of being exactly where I had envisioned, I began to lose motivation, and became stricken with these looming questions:

“What’s the point?”

“Why am I doing this?”

“Do things really matter?”

These were the questions and thoughts that trampled my mind, even after breaking free of the limiting thoughts created by the MLP. I had worked hard and succeeded in obtaining many of my life's dreams. I'd found my dream engineering job. I'd met and married my new amazing wife, and together we'd had a beautiful daughter. I'd obtained my bachelor's degree. I had a prominent, progressive military career. I'd built an investment and real estate portfolio. On top of all that, I'd played guitar for major recording artists!

My journey was just as this book describes: I gradually understood and freed myself from limiting beliefs; I developed the vision of how my life could be; I began to set goals, and planned out everything to the tee; lastly, I took action. But, despite all of this, and after manifesting almost all of my vision—toward the end of a journey that should have left me feeling on top of the world—I felt flat, kinda empty and exhausted.

What had happened? Where had I gone wrong? I should have been sitting on cloud nine, feeling like Zeus the Greek god, but instead I would go for days and weeks feeling like a sick billionaire—who had money to take care of every need, except that money couldn't heal the sickness. I couldn't seem to fix this feeling inside of myself, although I had so much of the success I had envisioned. The hole that seemed to be gnawing itself ever wider, tainting my happiness, couldn't be filled with anything I could eat or buy for self gratification. It was something much bigger, vital even. I wanted to find true fulfillment, and although most of my dreams had manifested—as well as having reached my goal of a nourishing, deeply committed relationship—I wasn't fulfilled. At least, not at the deepest level. I went through a long low time, soul searching and reflecting deeply on my life. I realized that if you *really* want to be fulfilled in life, then there is something more you're gonna need to discover for yourself—and I figured it out:

PURPOSE.

That's it. That's what I was missing. Purpose was my missing ingredient to living ultra-fulfilled and accomplished.

I know what you're thinking: Can you really have a vision, set goals to measure your progress towards the vision, execute a plan to

manifest that vision, and still be left UNFULFILLED? The answer is YES. That was me. I wish I had found out earlier, or in another way, but for me, I had to go through all the other challenges to be able to put the pieces together. I had gone through so much, learnt so much about myself and my place in the world. You could say that I'd found my voice, my power, and this made a lot of good things happen for me. And yet, despite all of this, in the end I couldn't stop thinking, what was it all for? What was the PURPOSE for everything? *What was my purpose?*

I consumed all the books I could find that might tell me. I listened to sermons, podcasts, motivational speeches. I talked to mentors, friends, and people I held in high regard. The consensus was: look outward.

So I began to do just that. I was given some suggestions of things I could do, ways that I could serve others. They were excellent ideas, but none of them were the right fit for me, really. I reflected, tried a few things, then reflected some more. What was I good at? I had learned the art of getting free, of seeing through the illusions that hold you down, especially when you're younger and haven't seen enough of the world to understand that most of what you think—about yourself and your limitations—isn't your own. You are the creation of other voices, other forces, when you're young. You may kick against convention, you may think you're a rebel, but not until you begin to see the roots of limiting thoughts and beliefs will you really start to break out of the boxes you've been squeezed into. So, yes, I knew about freeing the mind, and I knew about taking action to create new opportunities, new achievements, and new horizons. But how could I translate this knowledge into a purpose that would benefit others?

When I thought about it I had secretly been on a quest for *purpose* all my life, although I hadn't given a name to the internal longing. I remember as an adolescent asking my coaches and closest peers what they thought my purpose would be in life. They would chuckle, slightly taken aback by the serious question. After I came of age and began working in different roles for different employers, I noticed that, after some time, I would feel embedded in the work culture of the

time, treating it as my perceived purpose in life. Perhaps I did this because I wanted to do my best, but the result was that it blocked out my true purpose and made me settle for a smaller, tangible purpose. This was a dangerous hindrance. I was essentially allowing the world to define my purpose, rather than defining it for myself.

Like many others in the church, I would also ask my elders what they thought my purpose was. Some would give generic responses, such as “Your purpose is to praise God.” Others would tell me to just pray, ask God, and He will tell you. Although I believe they were right to some extent, I knew there was more to it. For some weird reason I was expecting God to speak to me out of the blue, one day. I was waiting for Him to interrupt while I was meditating. Perhaps He would say, “My son, here is the purpose that I have for you”—and He would lay it all out for me. But—surprise!—that didn’t happen. I don’t think I’m the only one who has expected, or hoped, to have their purpose laid out definitively and clearly, in terms they cannot mistake or dismiss. But it’s an unrealistic expectation, and all the time we’re looking for another voice—whether it’s divine or much nearer to Earth—we’re not paying attention to what’s happening inside ourselves.

There may be a voice speaking that we’re not listening to. There’s a connection, here, with the MLP and those other limiting beliefs we explored earlier in this book. There’s so much noise and information pulling us outside of ourselves, telling us to follow this, do that, get happy by going here or buying this, that we can’t find the space and the peace to look within ourselves and find the answers that have been there all along. You may have noticed that I’ve steered you back to the “Find Your Inner Vision” exercise in Chapter 4 several times. That’s because it is, arguably, the most important of all the strategies I’ve been showing you. Without knowledge of your inner vision, of your truest self and what it can tell you, you won’t be on the path that leads to your deepest purpose and happiness. So, go back to that exercise as many times as you need—this advice goes for any situation, at any time, where you feel you’re not in touch with your deepest feelings, insight, or truth.

Let’s step back for a moment—what is “purpose” exactly?

I'm glad you asked.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.” Simply put, everything that exists in this world—from trees, insects, plants, animals, to humans—all have a purpose for which they were created. Take the trees and plants, for example; without their oxygen production we as humans wouldn't be able to breathe on this planet. Also, the insects pollinate our fruits, vegetables, and flowers, providing us with food (and quite a bit of beauty). Trees, like every other created thing, can serve multiple purposes, such as providing habitat for birds and smaller animals, as well as providing oxygen. Just like the tree, as humans we have multiple purposes for which we were created, and it's up to us to walk towards understanding them daily, so we can live fulfilling our purposes. This is what gives us the ultra sense of fulfillment: walking in our purpose.

It's interesting and deserves deliberate thought: you never see a tree, or a dog, going around asking, “Hey, what am I supposed to be doing? What's my purpose?” They just *do*. They live within their purpose, without any need to search for it. The purpose for which they were created is built into them. As humans, we may struggle and may not think so, but in fact we're no different; we have our purpose built-in, and all it takes is for us to be patient with ourselves in order to tap into it. We need to stop, reflect, and call upon our vision (see Chapter 4). There are many ways in, but it starts with creating the space, the peace within you. Only then will you be able to see your purpose, hear it calling to you.

In my field of robotics, I like to share the following perspective with colleagues. Today many robots are being developed and tested to solve specific problems in the world. Robots can be used in a vast amount of applications. However, they are specifically designed (from their materials to their inner components) to support their intended purpose. This is why you don't see a vacuum robot being used to perform a manufacturing robot's functions—because its design doesn't support a purpose other than the function it's intended for. All robots have some type of computing device embedded within the

system, which can be viewed as its brain. Within these “brains” the coded software is stored that provides the robot with the instructions it needs to perform its function. Its purpose is literally written internally. This builds in a specific unique purpose for each robot. We may be far more complex and mysterious than a robot, but there is still an analogy to be made: like them, we humans have our purpose hard-coded within us. We just have to access it.

How did I access MINE?

What I found, after my years of searching, was that the universe began holding up a mirror before me, causing me to change the focus of my attention. Although it felt like a single powerful experience, it was the combined result of all that I had learned from my reading and the people that had spoken into my life, and the teachings I had gleaned from. Altogether they caused me to start focusing on the man in the mirror. I found myself standing in front of “ME”. When I was hunting for the “me” outside of myself, *that’s* when I was confused and lost. I was so busy focusing on everything I thought the world was saying about me and my purpose, that I lost who I really was. It might be better to say that I had never yet found the real Waylon. But, as the mirror of wisdom shone its light upon me, I was able to lean into my own intuition. It was then that I began to see the Waylon I had been looking for all my life. This was the larger, less constricted, pure “ME”. And he was not isolated, or anxious, or driven by selfish motives. He was connected to the deepest, divine well of life, he was an important element of everything, and he had purposes that had been placed inside him by the divine hand itself.

My purposes began unveiling themselves, like the petals of a flower blooming one at a time. First, I considered what I had managed to glean from my experiences:

- I had freed myself of limiting thoughts and illusory beliefs, and in the process I had found my own power, confidence, and ability to take action to improve my life. If I had done this for myself, perhaps I could do it for others. This was a

gift I could pass on to others: Freedom from limitation and self-imposed constraints.

- I had developed the ability to calm my mind so that I could know my inner truth and vision. Another gift I could teach others: Freedom and power to look inward and see clearly.
- I had taken action, and in doing so I had broken free of societal and cultural constraints. I could teach this.
- Finally, I had found my way toward knowing my deepest purposes. This was the greatest, most fulfilling knowledge that I could pass on.

So, all of this showed me my ultimate purpose, that stemmed from the divine purpose (that I spoke about earlier in this book). My purpose was to help others find their freedom, which would enable them to understand themselves fully and, with that understanding, create the life that would bring them their greatest happiness.

Through this purpose of helping others see and act clearly, it was revealed to me that I was also serving a deeper DIVINE purpose. As I described in Chapter 6, we all have a purpose placed inside of us, and if we can only act according to that purpose, it will be the perfect expression of our innate gifts. This potential that every person has, that could be called God-given, or could alternatively be called preordained (our destiny) sometimes needs a helping hand for it to emerge. It would be absurd for God to give us this purpose (and the gifts to match) if He did not want us to express it. Simply put, God wants us to find our purpose and express it, which not only brings about our own happiness, but also positive action in the world. This is God at work in the world; it is His will and purpose that we fulfill ours. With that in mind, I now know it is my deepest desire to be that helping hand, wherever it is in my power to do so. I believe, then, that my deepest purpose is serving the divine purpose.

I had hoped God would speak to me audibly as I meditated, but it didn't happen. But, as I found myself in touch with my deepest sense of "ME," revealing my core purpose, I knew that *this was the divine voice*. I was the Word, in the act of being spoken. Not in any grandiose sense

—every man, woman, and child are the same, I came to know. I wasn't special in that way: we are all special, all blessed, all sanctified. If I could reach in and help a person discover their own sense of "ME"—who they are at their divine root—then I would be facilitating the Word of God, as it spoke through every living individual. As I explained earlier, we all have our true purpose built-in, and it's up to us to discover it, if we want to be happy and live in tune with our genuine nature. So, I was serving the divine purpose if I could help clear away the sorrow, the fear, the self-limiting beliefs, in order to let the Word inside every person speak into the world. Only when a person is free, at peace, and empowered, can they know and act upon their God-given purpose. It doesn't matter what faith (or none) people have; their purpose is untouched by this, and is no less divine for what they may say or believe. God's house has many rooms. It is my purpose to assist, in whatever way I can, to bring their true, divine purpose out, for the benefit of the world. *This is my purpose.* Knowing it has set me free.

As I sat with the vision of "ME"—witnessing with humility and gratitude—thoughts and ideas began to flow, and kept coming. I couldn't turn them off. I began documenting them in a strategic manner that allowed me to see vividly the purpose, vision, and details that I needed to attend to.

The visions you receive are always connected to higher purposes.

Let's start looking at how you can discover your deeper purpose. Yes, I'm going to mention the "Find Your Inner Vision" exercise again. This is a great place to start. Any other meditation and reflection techniques that you have discovered can also be valuable. Like so many truths, there are many routes toward their discovery, and truth is truth, no matter how you find your way to it. Finding the approach that works for you is the biggest challenge, so don't be afraid to incorporate aspects of other approaches, if they work for you. The key to all of this is the ability to tune into your own inner voice, vision, and truth. Only you can know what ultimately will work for you. But it's a safe bet to say that quiet, peaceful reflection is going to be your greatest ally.

As I worked to put flesh on the bones of my first insight into purpose, I re-discovered a fundamental concept from the “Principles and Power of Vision” learned from my mentor Dr. Myles Munroe, that I think you will find useful. It allows you to capture and connect the different aspects of the insights, visions, and plans that will arise for you. This concept has a waterfall effect; each part flows down to the next part, allowing you to easily see the roadmap of your destiny. It allows you to refocus everything in your life with intentionality and meaning. Here’s how it goes:

- Purpose produces Vision
- Vision establishes Goals
- Goals generate Plans
- Plans create Action

This is called the PVGP model, for short. At the heart of everything is Purpose. It is this that creates the vision, or visions, that will guide you toward the Goals you want to achieve in life. Once you know these, having the skill to create clear, realistic Plans will empower you to take Action that will lead you to success!

As I reflected on my purpose, I could see that, from my overall life purpose, a whole host of other general purposes emerged, and revealed themselves to me. I found myself on a commuter train, bouncing through the sierra mountain range, and I thought to myself:

[PURPOSE] “OK, so the purpose of my life is to be a source of illumination to other people, and to radiate positivity and progressive change throughout the world.”

[VISION] “So, with this purpose, I envision a life in which I show others how to rise above their current circumstances and limitations, how to achieve success and find their own purpose, using my experience and knowledge [my gifts, talents, and skills—see Chapter 4].”

[GOALS] “How can I make this vision a reality? What should I be doing? What is the best way to communicate my message, clearly and in a way that enables people to return to it, and apply it as they grow? Writing, of course! I will start publishing best-selling books, filled

with practical advice and clear, inspirational encouragement. On top of this, I will develop and produce other products (using my engineering skills I have a range of consumer products planned) and, finally, I will release impactful musical projects.”

[PLANS] “I’m gonna need a plan to make these book goals a reality! Likewise with the other products and music projects, good strong plans will be my allies. I think I will also commit to educating myself more, to add more knowledge and experience in these areas [see Chapter 6 for how to make a plan].”



THESE WERE the words that helped me summarize my future steps, in easy to understand, concise statements. I know, shocking, right? You don’t have to create some over-complicated, intensely-worded statement. Just think it through and lay it out, step by step. As long as it truly captures your purposes and visions, your summary can be as plain and simple as you like. The important point is that it should allow your mind to see past your present, and to see how all of your gifts, talents and skills come together to create your future self. This is powerful because it will help you develop all of the plans and actions needed to manifest this version of yourself. This will cause you to start immensely valuing your time with everything you do. You will notice that in order to fulfill your purpose and vision, all of your actions must contribute to the fulfillment of your destiny. If they hinder you, you will begin to notice them—and simply put, you will begin to discard those activities. Don’t sweat it, and don’t compromise. If something isn’t serving you, let it go.

If others are involved, this can result in some difficulty, even resistance or pain, especially on the part of those who may sense that your priorities are changing. With regard to this, be compassionate and considerate, but don’t compromise. Gentle but firm is the way to go. In a nutshell, align your activity to ensure it supports your life purpose and vision. Always do this with kindness as well as honesty, toward yourself and others.

Now, as you have heard, I didn't know what my purpose was for a long time. That didn't mean that it wasn't there, and for you it doesn't mean that you won't be able to take positive steps toward your own happiness and success if you're not sure what your deepest purpose is yet. It's OK for these elements to come together in a slightly jumbled way. That's how it was for me. I needed to get myself free of confusion, find my way through the disappointment of not becoming the next football legend, and make my way through those first years of work. Only after all of that world the fog start to clear. It may be the same for you, so don't worry if you haven't got it all worked out yet, and if you don't know where you're at with any of this. Just start where you are, and work on finding that inner peace and quiet I've talked about so many times in this book. Everything flows from there.

One thing that is worth pointing out is that this is a forever process. As you grow, new purposes and visions will be revealed to you, day by day, as time unfolds. You are like the flower I mentioned earlier, blooming one petal at a time. This could seem daunting, but it is also rather wonderful, don't you think? None of us are static, one-dimensional beings. We are the unfolding of life itself, our energies, spirits, and purposes flowing, interacting and intertwining with all the other beings and energies of the universe. All part of the mysterious, eternal dance. So, don't worry about finding the one great purpose that will define you. Give in to the unfolding that is your journey. Find the purpose that is yours, in this moment, and allow yourself to inhabit it fully. It may develop into something new, something more, if it's meant to be. But there's no rush, and your path is uniquely your own. Be patient. As you capture each life instruction and make adjustments along the way, you will be guided through manifesting your destiny, all the way to your ultra-fulfillment.

Purpose is multi-dimensional, and revealed in phases. As we develop as humans, more revelation of our purpose is unlocked and we are able to serve our purpose in different ways, in different environments, and in varying capacities. Take, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King, raised in the American South at a young age, in the midst of the race relations calamity. As an adolescent he would suffer

and be impacted by the environment in which he lived. He would develop himself through education and became a prominent debater and speaker. This would prepare him for his next phase (purpose) as a pastor, leading a congregation of several hundred people. His purpose would expand again into another dimension as he increased his capacity. Eventually enabling him to lead thousands of people during the civil rights movement in the protests against the Jim Crow laws and unjust discrimination of Blacks in the South.

On reflection, I can look at my life in its various stages and see the purpose I was fulfilling at certain times. Like Dr. King, being raised in the South (in a different era) I was impacted tremendously by my environment as well. My life's course would be greatly impacted due to my family's limited resources and lack of financial literacy. I developed myself through sports (football) and music (guitar), becoming a confident, prominent leader. This would prepare me for my next phase (purpose) as an airman and engineer. I moved through the sequence of my life stages, unlocking deeper strengths and new purposes as I went.

Sports and music helped me discover how my gifts and talents served me, and how I could develop further. They prepared me for the military and engineering. Through sports I developed toughness, perseverance, and discipline, which prepared me for the military, and through music I developed a creative style and unique way of learning and expressing myself, which translates directly into how I have shown up as an engineer. After seeing how all of this was connected, I began to attribute more deliberate focus to all of the actions and things that I do daily. This empowered me to remove things from my life that didn't serve a purpose. In return I began to capture and define my life's key areas: purpose, vision, goals, and plans, such as my work, family, music, business, investments, philanthropy, etc. I utilized the PVGP model to document the details that connect to all of my dreams and visions.

As I continue to work, grow and expand my knowledge, I know that my purpose will expand in response, allowing me to address the unique areas and problems I was designed to take on in this world.

Wow, talk about something to look forward to! That's the beauty of being alive. Life is like an artist, a sculptor who chips away one piece at a time, until a beautiful sculpture is revealed. But that's not the end, because another artwork exists underneath, and life begins revealing this, too. And forward we move—all continuing to reveal new beauty, new purpose, new wonders, surrendering to the unfolding truth of our being!

CONCLUSION

THE NEW “YOU”

Reading self-improvement books, listening to talks, podcasts, and sermons, and seeking advice from wise people, are all great—as far as they go.

But there is a world of difference between knowledge and understanding; between receiving advice and acting on it. It doesn't matter how good the advice is, how relevant or valuable. A person could be given their deepest purpose on a plate; it is still down to that person to discover that purpose for themselves. To embody it. Only when we search for ourselves, and experience the moment of discovery as the fruit of our own efforts, will we enter into true understanding of who we are and why we are here.

I'm not saying that a book like this isn't valuable. What I'm saying is that advice is a signpost. It's up to you to make the journey. What's the point of buying a map, or googling a route, if you're not gonna go on that particular journey? Don't be an observer or a bench rider. Get in the game. Lace up your cleats and get out there.

Finding your divine purpose takes honesty, courage, and a fair bit of determination. It also takes a genuine desire to *go somewhere*. But it's worth it. I'll say that again: *it's worth it*.

And here's the best news: you don't have to do it all at once. A long journey can feel daunting, but you don't have to think about doing it all in one go. All you need to do is think about one small step, one small change. All great journeys are made up of lots of smaller trips, or legs.

You don't have to plan to make the big journey, not right now. You don't even have to know what the big journey would look like.

And if change seems hard, even impossible to you now, don't worry. Think about one thing, just one thing.

What would improve your life, just a little bit, right now? How could you bring a tiny bit of peaceful reflection into your day, so that you could start the reflection practices I showed you in this book? Ten minutes, five minutes, that's all you need. Turn the news podcast off for a few minutes while you're on the train, or go to bed five minutes earlier and spend those minutes in quiet reflection. Work on making that small change that will help you feel a little happier, a little more rested, a little more present to yourself.

I can almost guarantee you that this one small change will light a small, inextinguishable fire in you.

It may not be immediate, and it may be a long time until you make a second change, but the time will come. The fire of hope and inspiration never dies out. Try it. Before too long, you will be on a lifelong journey of irreversible transformation toward happiness and freedom. This is the law of transcendence. I didn't create it, all I did was discover it for myself. You will too. Not through being a hero launching into major change with the force of a rocket. Instead by quietly looking at your life as it is now, identifying the one thing you want to change the most, and aiming steadily toward making that change. After that, you'll be on the journey, whether you know it or not, and momentum will start to guide you along.

Life is a struggle, no doubt, and sometimes it's filled with anxiety. Like the mighty ocean waters beneath and the vast mountain ranges above, our lives are made up of peaks and valleys. Sometimes we rise to the heavens, and sometimes we fall to the depths. It's an endless,

dizzying cycle. It can feel exhausting; however, this is what allows us to evolve into the prolific beings we were designed to be. This is life, the sculptor, chipping away at the masterpiece that is you.

I challenge every reader: take flight towards your ambitions and goals, just as I did in my first flying experience. When you take the leap (and even that one small step can feel like a leap) it will be scary, but you really have nothing to lose and everything to gain. When you begin to look within, you will harness all your superpowers, transforming your way of thinking; and as you do, breakthroughs will come. I promise. Transcendence is your birthright.

Use the techniques and guidance in this book to help you in your journey of discovery. As you begin to clear away the fog of limiting beliefs, you will realize that, although they may have provided some kind of structure (as the *model life paradigm* does), yet it leaves many souls desolate and lost, yearning for direction and acknowledgement. The exercises in this book act as an antidote, an alternate, positive route to structure. Think of them as practical, moral, and emotional aids, adding up to a kind of “destiny compass.” With their help, you can connect deeper within yourself to inspire change.

The words in this book detail some of my life’s most precious experiences and the waters I charted to break into new worlds of freedom and clarity. I subscribe to the belief that, when you free your mind, everything you’re trying to work through in life will meet with success. Bob Marley once said, “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.” This statement, filled with ultimate truth, reflects that only you can save yourself. When you put in the time and energy to work on yourself, the universe will respond. It will help you become whole. Only when we are whole can we truly create change and effectively contribute to the world.

May you take flight towards your destiny and continue to share the light and testament of this work. May your efforts bear fruit, enabling others to live their lives to the fullest, in the joy and freedom of self-awareness and

enlightenment.

May you find *Transcendence*.

AFTERWORD

To support you in your journey towards manifesting your vision, I have created a journal that accompanies this book, to help you explore the exercises introduced in its pages.

You can get your journal at:

wayloncornelius.com



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Waylon Cornelius is an engineer, U.S. Air Force Sergeant, musician, investor, and novelist. He has shared the stage with national recording artists, built revolutionary robotic platforms in the world's leading innovative region Silicon Valley, all while proudly serving his country during wartime. His work across multiple disciplines addresses diverse narratives of the human experience. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies-Computer Science from Thomas Edison State University. A South Carolina native, he is a lover of music, finance, literature, and weight training.

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